The Paris Review

89

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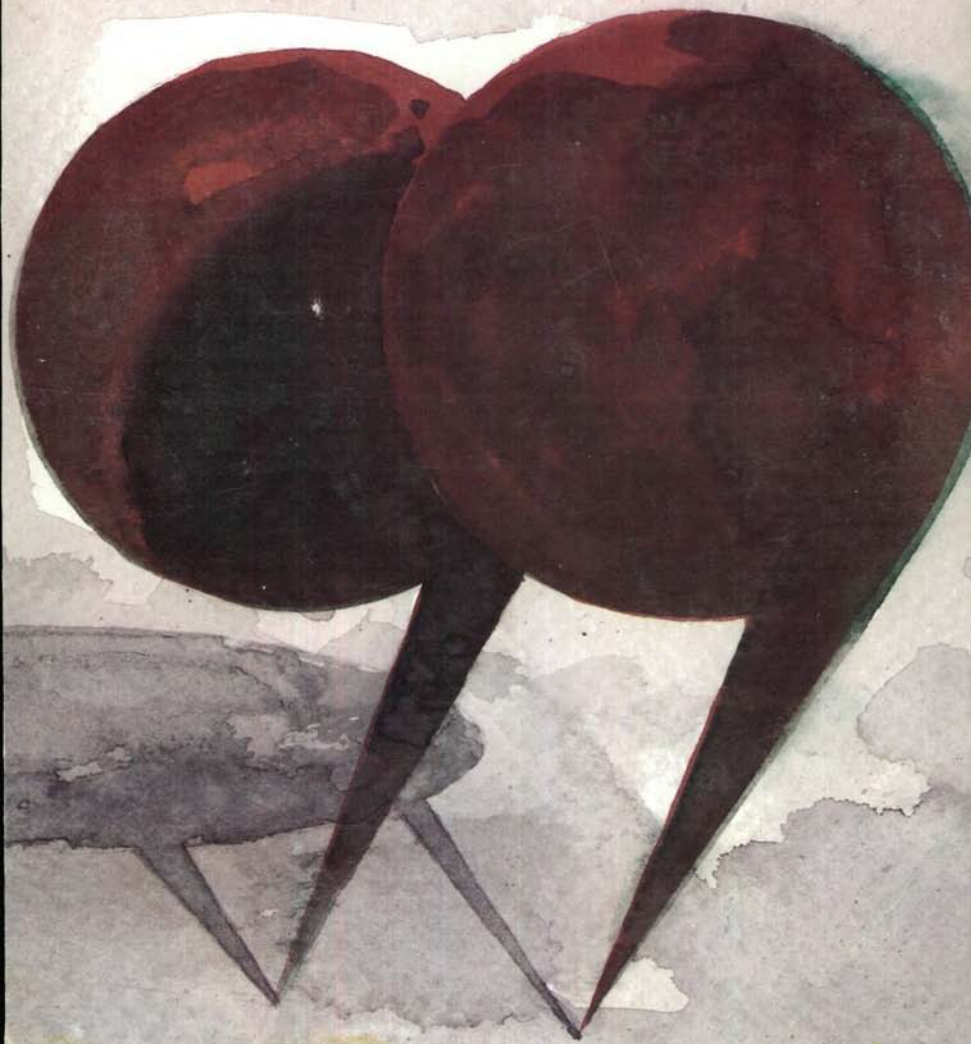

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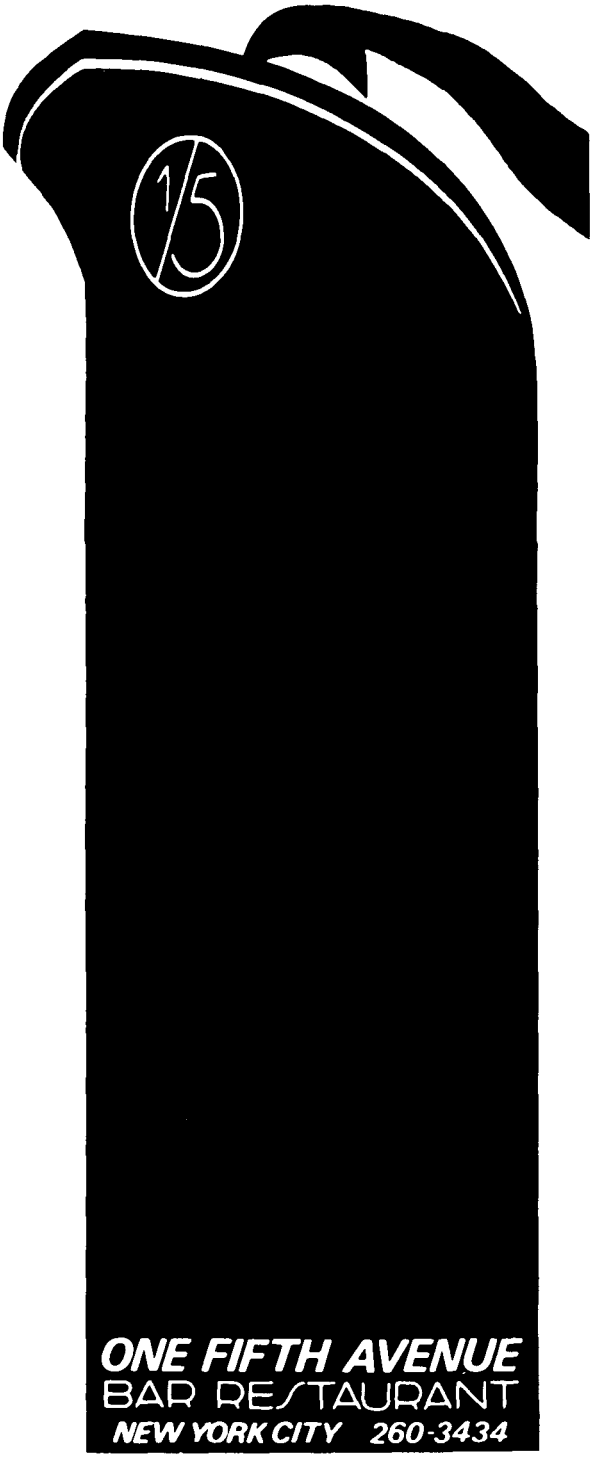

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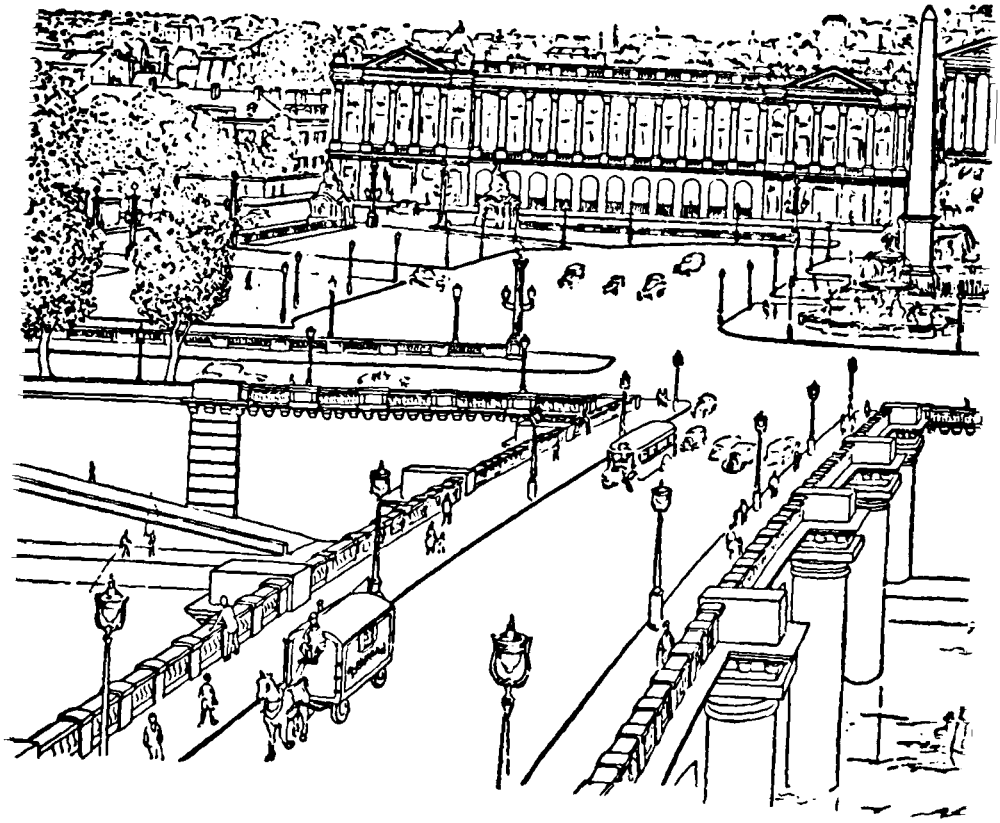

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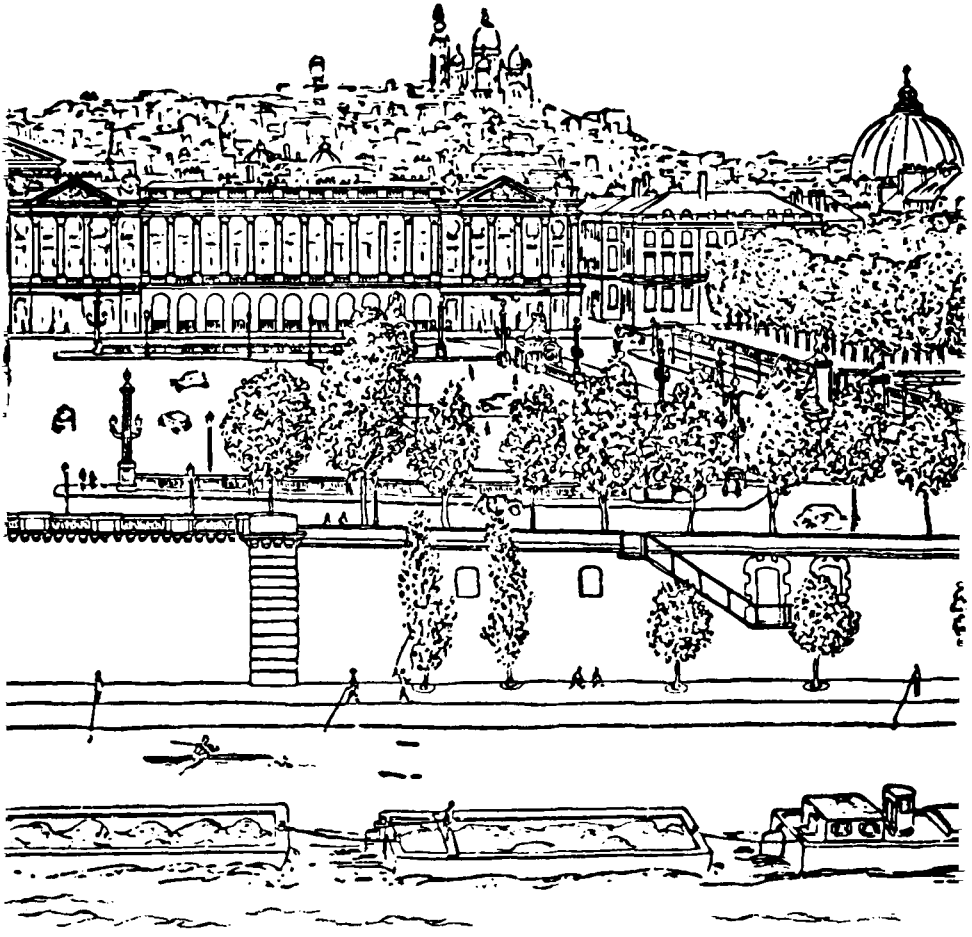

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The Paris Review is pleased to announce the new JOHN TRAIN HUMOR PRIZE of $1500 to be awarded annually to that story which is selected by the judges. The four judges will be George Plimpton, John Train, Lewis Lapham and Brendan Gill. Details will appear in the next issue.

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Daogiri

Victor Perera

I

"Daogiri," said Abdullah, their chauffeur-guide, gesturing freely, "is an impregnable fortress. Absolutely. The sides are so steep and smooth that an ant could not climb them—nor even a snake."

From a mile's distance, where Stanley Bendana, rounding out a two-year stint in the Peace Corps with a tour of South India, and Mrs. Majumdar had stopped on the roadside for a panoramic view, the citadel had looked impressive enough: a cone of gray rock with a scarped waist that rose sheer from the flat, brown Deccan plateau. But it seemed hardly worth the taking; the palace treasures had long since vanished, and the battlements were pocked and crumbled by age and waves of successive assaults by Deccan rajahs, Turkish sultans, Mughal kings and—in the 17th and 19th centuries—by the Dutch and the conquering British. They had all had their season at Daogiri. The smarter assailants had camped outside and laid long patient sieges that starved out the defenders from within—and then forced them to pay exorbitant

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tribute. Though Daogiri itself had remained impregnable, its occupants over the centuries had proven all too vulnerable without food or water.

Mrs. Majumdar had promised Stanley a visit to Daogiri after he confessed that old fortresses held a special fascination for him.

"You will like the fortifications, Stanley," she predicted, adjusting her steel-rimmed spectacles—"especially the Mughal cannon, and the frescoes of celestial maidens naked to the waist. Above all the frescoes. Americans always like the frescoes best of all."

"Perhaps so," said Stanley, who made up his mind to steal away from his hostess at the first opportunity and explore the fortress on his own. After a week with the relentlessly hospitable Majumdars he was badly in need of solitude. He was still feeling the aftereffects of the last night's slide show, which he had attended at her husband, the university rector's, insistence. He had sat in the airless, darkened hall of the Aurangabad Rotary Club, sunk in a deepening apathy, as the fans whirred monotonously overhead, while bats, flies and mosquitoes circled and "America-returned" Professor Sharma embellished his photography with a high-pitched pedagogical drone. For an hour he had shown blurred slides of Disneyland, which he called the greatest marvel of American technology—ahead of the atomic bomb and the Hoover Dam. He had twice referred to an oddly angled, off-focus Chrysler Building as "the Empire State, the tallest building in America." (Would Stanley's own reflections of India prove as distorted? He hoped not.)

Stanley still felt a tingling in the back of his neck where the bat had landed after striking the fan. It had seized his collar and cheeped frantically in the dark, as Professor Sharma droned on, relocating the Williamsburg Bridge in the Bronx, slandering the Radio City Music Hall "Rocketeers" and mangling even poor Emma Lazarus's summons to "the sickly and wounded masses."

"Do not move please," the man seated next to him had whispered. A loinclothed Rotarian, and local doctor, he had

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placed his handkerchief on the stunned bat, loosened it, and let it out the window.

His host, Rector Majumdar, who had quotes handy for all occasions, made light of the incident by citing Dr. Samuel Johnson on the subject of bats. But to Stanley it had been an omen. Bats don't bump into fans and light on necks without a reason. Wasn't their radar supposed to be infallible?

"And how have you profited from your experience in the Peace Corps?" Rector Majumdar asked him at dinner after the lecture; it was the third time he had posed the question in the past week. They sat at an enormous long table. At the far end the rector's tiny octogenarian mother sat hunched in a wheelchair, a study in obdurate immobility. She was paralyzed from the waist down, and barely able to feed herself; yet that morning Stanley had watched through a half-open shutter in his room as a servant girl had brought Ammaji her son's stool in a chamber pot. She had inspected it closely before nodding her head. "Needs more curds," she had muttered.

"It's a challenge," Stanley had answered the first time, and shifted the conversation to Mrs. Majumdar's latest volume of self-published rhyming verse, from which she liked to quote at length when not describing her new book on Indian embroidery. The Majumdars were childless; their books were their proud offspring. The second time Stanley had dodged the question by talking instead of the administrative structure of Midwestern University, in Michigan, where he had taught Far Eastern history for two years. University administration was the Cambridge-educated rector's hobby-horse, and he rode it humorlessly, ceaselessly, without the slightest consideration for his audience. The Majumdars really were a boorish, self-inflated Brahmin couple; he would not have accepted their invitation had they not been relatives of Srilata, the woman he had courted for over a year, and very nearly asked to marry.

"Come now, Stanley." The rector would not be put off. "You are not suggesting, are you, that working in the Peace

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Corps is analogous to teaching Far Eastern history at an American university?"

"To work for the Peace Corps," Stanley said with a sigh, "is to go out on a dead limb."

"What?" The rector's eyebrows shot up above the rims of his bifocals. "Is this a peculiarly American expression? Could you explain the metaphor to us, please?"

Stanley peered out the window into the Majumdar's luxuriant Mughal garden. A dark, slender servant girl appeared with a brass jar on one hip and walked slowly between a stand of oleander and two leafy banana trees. The brilliant scarlet of her blouse and the muted pink of the oleander meshed softly one moment, then flew apart as she climbed up on the well and squatted on its rim, extending her slender brown arms toward the bucket-rope. The redness of her blouse expanded and vibrated in Stanley's eyes with a life of its own. These stabs of color—glimpses of a thriving sensual life separate from his own—had helped to make his months in India bearable since his breakup with Srilata. But they seldom stayed with him. Afterward he felt more hidebound, lonely and dejected than ever.

"I meant to say," Stanley weighed his words, "that for two years I have been working for an institution whose time has come and gone. The Peace Corps, in my opinion, is already past history, like the British Raj." He had no desire to marshal the evidence: the gross mismanagement at the head office in Delhi, the cutback in funds that would be diverted, instead, to the armaments race—not to mention the deteriorating morale among the newer volunteers and the growing incidence of amoebic dysentery and hepatitis . . .

A loud slurping noise, as Ammaji started on her soup . . .

"Ah indeed, but permit me, dear Stanley, to point out a serious flaw in your analogy: the institutions left behind by the British are alive still and functioning quite competently, all things considered. I am not referring only to the railroads—" the rector smiled, "—but in my humble opinion the Indian Civil Service is in better working order today than in the heyday of the British occupation, and as for the uni-

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versities . . ."

Stanley's gaze returned to the girl in the garden who still perched delicately on the well's rim as she hoisted up the bucket, hand over hand. Her orange sari was tucked up between her legs, like a fisher-woman's, but one corner fell over the edge and merged with the greenery. The rector's peroration became a meaningless buzz, like a bothersome fly's. Stanley knew all the arguments by heart. He was tired of glib, nationalistic Brahmins, of fawning pukka bureaucrats with veiled anti-American hostilities; he'd had his fill of inept, insensitive American officials and above all he was sick, heartily sick, of history.

II

Nonetheless, the night before the climb Stanley foraged in the Indian history shelves of the rector's library and uncovered a wealth of information. Daogiri had once been a great medieval city, with magnificent gardens and twenty miles of retaining wall. For centuries the citadel had held the key to domination of the entire Deccan, east of Bombay. Every aspiring conqueror of India, from Ala-ud-din to Shah Jahan and the British, had at one time or another held title to the fortress or mounted an assault against it.

The amount of blood shed by Daogiri's conquerors and defenders was staggering. The city had known mad parricides, homicidal eunuchs, pitched battles that seemed out of the *Mahabharata,* and an unending pageant of rajahs, sultans and kings who, after a brief moment of power and glory, met violent deaths. Ala-ud-din laid an ambush for his uncle Faruz here in 1296, beheaded him and proclaimed himself king. Shah Jahan, the builder of the Taj Mahal, was laying siege to Daogiri when he received word of the death of his wife, Mumtaz. In 1626, the Amazon warrior, wife of Hamid Khan, drove away an entire army and captured its elephants and artillery.

But the one who ignited Stanley's imagination was the mad Turk, Muhammad bin Tughluq, who had named him-

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self sultan of all India after killing his own father by toppling a pavilion onto his head with parading elephants. Tughluq, whom the Moorish traveler Ibn Batutah had described as "a freak of nature," was a brilliant logician and calligraphist and one of the most accomplished scholars of his time, with a passion for Persian poetry. Generous to a fault, in the early years of his reign he distributed gold and copper coins among his subjects. But as rebellion and discontent spread throughout his kingdom, Tughluq's dark, suspicious side and his explosive temper gradually got the better of him. In 1329, he evacuated all of Delhi in a fit of pique over an abortive uprising, and marched the entire population to Daogiri, a distance of nearly seven hundred miles. He was particularly vindictive against rebels and traitors within his fold, for whom he devised diabolical punishments. A first cousin who had revolted in the Deccan was subjected to the insults of the women in his harem and then flayed alive. "His flesh was cooked with rice and offered to the elephants, after portions of it had been sent to his wife and children, and his skin was stuffed with straw and exhibited in the principal cities of the kingdom."

Tughluq was a genius of doomed, extravagant enterprises. He launched an expeditionary force against China and Tibet in the dead of winter, convinced that his unbounded wrath would spur his army on to victory. Without adequate clothing or provisions, they were killed almost to a man by the rugged mountaineers. He was a man of terrible contradictions. After a successful campaign he beheaded captured enemies by the hundreds and displayed their heads on the battlements. And yet, he insisted a young nobleman give him twenty strokes of the lash for committing a breach of abstract justice. Eventually, Tughluq came to regard his subjects as his sworn enemies, and kept them in abject submission with severe penal laws; yet he would abase himself before foreign visitors, however humble and impoverished, and shower them with money and land titles. "Of all men the fondest of making gifts and shedding blood," Batutah had summed him up . . . odd duck, Tughluq; a psychopath, no

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doubt, but a powerfully affecting one. Stanley imagined him as his own natural opposite, a warped yet arresting figure, without a vacillating bone in his body. If Tughluq fell in love, he would move heaven and earth to obtain his prize.

Stanley had met Srilata at a U.S. Embassy party in Chandigarh, and had been instantly charmed. He had not imagined that he would meet in India a young woman of her wit, her unselfconscious intelligence and independence. She was not beautiful in the conventional sense—too tall and thin for Indian standards—but her huge clear brown eyes brimmed with vitality, and her laughter rippled and cascaded around him. She was evidently not inhibited by the taboo against flirting with foreigners; she had lightly brushed her thigh against him more than once, so he could feel the soft roundness under the folds of her silk sari.

He had seen her often during his first year in India, and they had touched, held hands, kissed in dark and out-of-the-way places but he had not made love to her because she was a good family Brahmin. Her parents had betrothed her at the age of seventeen to a Civil Service officer in Mysore named Gupta, whom she had never met.

But they had attended concerts and university lectures, and had once driven unchaperoned on a moonlit visit to the Taj. "Our rhythms are so different," Stanley, she had told him. "We measure time with different yardsticks." Still he had felt close to her then, and he had nearly persuaded himself that he was in love with her, that he had begun to understand at last what the word meant.

The correctness of Stanley's intentions had been taken for granted by Srilata's parents, who regarded themselves as 'progressive' meat-eating Hindus since their eldest son had graduated from Cambridge ten years earlier. So far as he knew they never countenanced him as a prospective suitor for their daughter, although 'love-matches' were not unknown in her family. In their eyes he was a suitable male companion who helped to broaden their daughter's appreciation of American culture. Her marriage to Gupta, who was seventeen years her senior, was a foregone conclusion that awaited only the tech-

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nicality of her twenty-first birthday.

"By all the standards that our Brahmin community holds sacred," Srilata had told him once, with a half-amused, half-rueful smile, "Mr. Gupta is a superlative match." And then she had laughed the tumbling, cascading laughter that never failed to disarm and arouse him.

Another time she had told him: "I am afraid of the West, Stanley—it's that simple. I am terrified of what a big car, color TV and automatic dishwasher will do to my character. It is stated in the Vedas that there are four basic stages in world history, which repeat themselves again and again, in a perpetual cycle. We are now in the fourth stage, the Kali Yuga, the most wicked and degenerate of all, in which man becomes so ingenious he creates the instruments of his own destruction. I am susceptible to the glamorous by-products of that ingenuity. I love large fridges and microwave ovens, and fear that I would lose not only my caste-standing by traveling abroad with you, but my very soul."

Like their first meeting, their last encounter had taken place as in a dream, in the Buddhajayanta gardens outside of Delhi. They had walked arm in arm between rows of purple jacaranda trees as a lavender monsoon sunset exploded over the sky.

"Our rhythms, Stanley, are so very different," she'd said again, "I feel it even in the way you show your desire for me—the intensity of it. In our culture we do not separate love for a person from the sexual act, which you Americans seem able to do with such comparative abandon. I fear that if I were to submit to you I would be carried so far beyond the limits of my nature, so far beyond my very *self* that I would split apart and become a sort of hybrid—neither all Indian nor altogether Western. I could never exchange my roots here, and the traditions that nourish me, for that sort of prospect."

"Then you will marry your Mr. Gupta, like a good Brahmin," he had said, unable to keep a sharp edge from his voice.

She had met his eyes and tossed the top of her sari over one

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shoulder. "Perhaps I will, and perhaps not. I may choose to kick up my heels after all. But that is hardly the point, is it?"

She had written him several letters after that, composed in the Tourist Office where she worked afternoons. She explained her decision in painstaking detail, always coming back to the differences in their "rhythms" and her need for tradition and roots. To Stanley it had seemed that she was trying to persuade herself at the same time that she was challenging him to knock down her objections.

One afternoon he had called her in desperation from the postal clerk's telephone, twelve miles from the village. He had shouted to be heard above the clacking of the clerk's typewriter, the squalling of infants in the next room. "I love you!" he had come prepared to say, "I want you to be my wife." But it was impossible: within an hour the clerk would have broadcast his words throughout the province. And so he had shouted instead, "I respect your decision! I do! I understand!" At that moment something had broken, for he knew his fear had won out, and the decision had in the end been as much his as Srilata's.

After that he had seen Srilata only once more, briefly, at a family get-together in Delhi where he had also met the visiting Majumdars. Their eyes had met more than once, but they had confined their conversation to trivialities.

In the weeks after his telephone call to Srilata he'd had frequent dreams and fantasies of what their life would have been like in the States. He dreamed of bringing Srilata to dinner at his Jewish parents' home in Great Neck, Long Island, of attending theaters together, of shopping in the A&P and introducing her to his friends. In the dreams something always went terribly amiss. His mother would make a tasteless remark about her *bindhi*, which aroused Srilata's quick Brahmin temper ("That dot on your forehead, my dear, is it a sign of purity?" "No, Mrs. Bendana, it is a subtle bullet-hole."). Or they would be attacked in the elevator of their apartment building by two knife-wielding blacks who ripped apart her sari and raped her, as he looked on in helpless horror . . .

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And so the hankering in him, the mixture of sexual and other hungers for Srilata, and the shapeless obsession he had not had the courage to dignify with the word "love," had turned in upon him; the intensity had soured into melancholy.

In the months of his infatuation with Srilata his work had gone well in the Punjabi village where he and two fellow volunteers, Mary Josephs and Michael O'Rourke, were building an elementary school and a modern dairy. It surprised him how quickly he acquired carpentry skills from Michael, and Mary Josephs, an Iowa farmer's daughter, had taught him the rhythms of farm life. More and more, he came to see death as a stage in a protean, regenerative process, a prefiguration of ampler being. It was the hardest test he had ever faced.

But then he broke up with Srilata; the monsoon rains came early and washed away the new latrines and part of the dairy, just as it was nearing completion. And everything turned sour, almost overnight. In Jenar, he discovered life and death, beauty and terror were not two faces of a single coin. They were the same face. When both Michael and Mary Josephs fell ill, Stanley helped them recover and then left the village in a state of numbness.

He spent his remaining six months behind a desk at the head office in Delhi briefing new volunteers. In the end he did not blame the farmers for stealing the cows and appropriating the school funds. Of what use was a school more or less, when more than half the villagers did not get the needed proteins to quicken their brain cells into announcing "I want —I need—I am"? After centuries and centuries of chronic undernourishment, how much difference could a school or a dairy make to people who had evolved no separate, sovereign self to educate or to nourish?

Before the end of Stanley's stay in Jenar, even Gopal Rao, the village headman, and the other elders lost all individuality in his eyes and receded into the mass. He no longer saw the village as a community but as a kind of human beast whose only recognizable features were hunger and disease.

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III

Later that morning Abdullah, the family chauffeur and unofficial guide, drove Stanley and Mrs. Majumdar through the small Moslem village outside the ancient walls of Daogiri. In the bazaar a commotion was being raised by a band of odd-looking women in cheap bright saris, who had stopped traffic. They stood in the middle of the narrow dirt street, chanting in low, husky voices, banging pots and wooden blocks with their eyes fixed on the upper window of a two-story private house. They seemed very tall and angular for Indian women.

"These are *hijras*, Stanley," Mrs. Majumdar said. "They are hermaphrodites, and they have found out that one of their kind has just been born in that house, so they have come to claim it. They wander around the countryside like common beggars, jostling people in the streets, begging and stealing and making general nuisances of themselves. As you can see for yourself, they are a rude, vulgar people."

Abdullah turned and smiled at Stanley, without ceasing to honk his horn. "Some also live from prostitution," he said cheerfully, showing large, betel-stained teeth under his greased mustache.

"What will happen to the baby?" Stanley asked.

"They will use it for begging purposes, sahib. When it is old enough, then he/she will probably turn to prostitution."

"Interesting," said Stanley, gritting his teeth. Another dislocation. One more damaging assault on his sanity. Hermaphrodite prostitutes! India, the poorest country on earth, was extravagant with its freaks and grotesques.

They entered the crenellated walls and passed the Chand Minar, a victory tower erected by one of the Mughal kings after he had broken a long siege and routed his enemies. The Jain temple behind it looked spotlessly clean and sterile, and the giant stone effigy was naked and sexless.

The low stretch of bush separating the temple from the fortress was dense enough to conceal not only wild peacocks,

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whose mournful cries continually pierced the morning stillness, but small bands of spotted deer, wild boar and perhaps even an occasional leopard that might venture inside the walls in search of easy prey.

"Many snakes too, sahib," Abdullah said. "This bush is very favored by cobras and kraits."

Stanley insisted on walking the hundred yards of narrow grass path to the fortress' archway, despite the exhortations of Mrs. Majumdar, who followed in the car, calling out the window, "Stay in the middle of the path, Stanley, and keep a sharp eye out for snakes."

He was not afraid of snakes. In Jenar he had coolly handled several nonpoisonous specimens that had wandered into their living quarters. But he'd acquired a healthy respect for cobras, and particularly for kraits, their smaller and deadlier cousins.

"In my last incarnation," he had joked to Srilata once, "I was probably a mongoose."

"Yes," she'd said, "and a foolhardy one. You probably died a premature death."

The drawbridge was lowered by two urchins, and they crossed the moat on foot. On the other side, two tall, turbaned bearers stood by with a canopied wooden chair, on which Mrs. Majumdar would accommodate herself for the arduous climb to the citadel.

"My legs," she explained, loosening the folds of her cotton sari and tucking them under her thick waist. "They are not as sturdy as they once were."

Stanley looked up at the bare, polished escarpment, and whistled. It was as smooth as glass, and almost perpendicular to a height of at least two hundred feet, above which the citadel proper was built. No niches for spikes, crampons or rope hooks. No Hillary could conquer *this* rock pile without a rope ladder, tossed from above. The winding steps had been tooled into the rock with a singular regard for proportion and symmetry.

"Three thousand steps, merely." Abdullah grinned as he scratched under his brown achkan cap. "Maybe the sahib will

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be wanting a chair?"

"I'll manage on foot, thanks. I could use the exercise."

A sharp, plaintive cry made him turn reflexively, but there was no peacock to be seen. The acoustics of this place were deceptive; the cry had come from far back in the bush.

Before starting up the steps he peered down into the moat, hewn out of the obdurate rock as the Kailasa temple had been. There was no way to gauge its depth; the surface was covered with a green jelly made up of lily pad, scum and small, iridescent frogs—hundreds of them. Over there, on the far edge, a brown water snake lay coiled like a whip, waiting for an unwary frog to plop within range of its jaws.

It had been over a year since Stanley had carried a camera, but now he wished he'd brought one. With one or without, he was ending his Indian adventure the way he began it—as a tourist.

The first tier of steps were easy, and he took them two at a time, ahead of Abdullah and the bearers, who ferried Mrs. Majumdar with an excessive gingerliness, as if she were a fragile deity they were returning to its sanctum.

Stanley paused at every overlook to gaze down the scarped wall into the moat, which changed in appearance from a winding tile mosaic to a green woven ribbon.

The higher he climbed, the better he could appreciate the layout of Daogiri, and the enormous care expended on its protection. The low, thick underbrush spread only as far as the distant walls and no farther, as if by a fluke of topography. Beyond the walls he saw the Moslem village, its air hazed with the smoke of burning cow dung; and beyond the village stretched the sere, sun-hardened Deccan plateau, one of the oldest land masses on earth, unvisited by the sea in millions of years.

He started up the third tier of steps, which curved away from the moat into the heart of the rock. These were a good deal steeper, and he had not gone far when Abdullah called from below, and then caught up with him, panting and mopping his brow.

"Sahib, sahib, one moment please, sahib. Kindly come

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down with me briefly and you will see here the first line of fortifications . . . if it happened through some luck or treachery that the attackers breached the moat and attempted to scale the wall . . . here you see—" he indicated two huge lion-headed spouts that jutted out of the rock-face—"the defenders would tip over large cauldrons of boiling oil . . . through here, you see, saab . . . and this would fry and melt the heads of the unfortunate assailants." He chuckled softly, bristling his mustaches and flaring the nostrils of his bulbous nose, pitted from childhood smallpox. Impossible not to like this coarse, irreverent Moslem. In his own way, Abdullah was a cultivated man.

Mrs. Majumdar and her bearers appeared on the parapet. "Did you tell Mr. Bendana about the boiling oil?" she asked avidly, fanning herself with her purse.

"Acha, memsahib. I was about to tell the sahib, very few assailants are believed to have penetrated the first line of defense."

A peacock's call rose far below from the bush, like a cry of distress or melancholy. The stairs curved inward like a snail's shell and stopped at the mouth of a tunnel. A khaki-uniformed porter in bare feet stopped Stanley from entering the huge double gate, which had been elephant-proofed with six-inch spikes and ornate locks.

"You will be needing a guide here, please," said the porter. "Very dark inside. Very dangerous."

A vision of Tughluq passed suddenly before Stanley's inner eye—the sultan borne along in a broad litter, a Rolls Royce of palanquins, encrusted with diamonds and rubies. On top of each of the four poles sat a human skull. . . .

A young Western couple had also been stopped because they had no guide; they sat sulking against the wall. Both were dressed in loose-fitting cotton robes, and the young man, who had a scraggly blond beard, concealed his topknot with an embroidered fez.

Abdullah caught up with Stanley. He was carrying a bunch of dry grass in his hand. "Very treacherous dark inside, saab," he said. "You must kindly stay close, very close to me. The

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memsahib is taking a diversion and will meet us higher up, by the frescoes." He bobbed his head and grinned. "She is not liking this dark tunnel very much, the memsahib."

"Hey man," the young traveler called to Abdullah, "can we come along and join your group? We've been waiting here half an hour for a guide." Behind the dark glasses, the fez, and the scraggly beard, Stanley guessed him to be no more than twenty-one.

The barefooted porter shook his head. "An officer will be along presently," he said; he turned, and spoke in very rapid Marathi to Abdullah, who looked dubiously toward Stanley. "This is a matter for the sahib to decide," Abdullah explained. "It is very cramped quarters inside for a party of four."

Stanley's rudimentary Hindi was of little help, but at last he intervened in the couple's behalf, and the porter reluctantly gave in. After the huge spiked gate was opened with a set of three skeleton keys Abdullah lit a match to his grass torch, and led the way inside.

"So-lowly," he said, stretching the first syllable into two. "So-lowly please, sahib. It is a very treacherous dark place."

At first, Stanley could see nothing but the torch itself, and Abdullah's swarthy, pocked face flickering yellow beside it. A few steps into the tunnel he was hit by the smell of bat excrement; he drew in his neck.

"You will stop here, please, and stand close to me." As they huddled around Abdullah, the girl's breast brushed Stanley's elbow and he caught his breath.

Abdullah lowered the torch slowly toward the floor. "If any of the assailants were missed by the boiling oil and scaled the wall, and somehow came through the gate, then see, please, what good fortune awaited them."

Stanley made out the outlines of a gaping hole at his feet, covered by a metal lid.

"You can see here a very large opening in the ground. When the assailant stepped here, the cover gave way and he fell down into a pit at the bottom of the moat, a fall of more than two hundred feet. The bottom of the pit was filled with

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crocodiles, scorpions, and deadly serpents . . . today, there are mostly frogs and small fish."

"Far out," said the young man. "Did anyone fall in?"

"It is believed," said Abdullah solemnly, "that Muhammad bin Tughluq when he held this fortress would throw traitors and other enemies into the pit, and sometimes, as well, a wife who displeased him."

The girl asked, "And have they found the bodies?"

"No one has dredged the moat as yet. It is deep, deep water, fifteen or twenty feet. But you have my word. There are many human bones in the bottom. Many, many bones. If you throw in a hook with a worm, you might first catch the skull of a Yadava rajah or a lowly sultan before you ever hook a fish."

"Abdullah," Stanley asked, "where did they get their drinking water?"

"Ah, that is a good question, sahib, a very good question. It is believed there is an underground spring in Daogiri, but no one has been able to locate it. Over there—" he pointed the torch at a hidden niche in the nearest wall—"guards with spears lay in wait for anyone who escaped the pit. If the guards were overpowered, then one more unpleasant surprise awaited the assailants. Follow me please. . ." He proceeded several more steps and shone the torch at a grating in the ceiling. "Above this opening is a brazier in which a large fire was lighted in such a way that the draft sucked thick smoke and cinders into the tunnel, filling it and blinding the assailants, who then fell back into the trap door and down into the pit. Now you will kindly follow me closely to the exit, and careful please not to scrape your head. There are wasp nests on the ceiling. . . ."

"Well, Stanley, and did you enjoy the tunnel?" asked Mrs. Majumdar, as they came up on the terrace. She had stepped off the chair to rest the bearers, who squatted against the parapet and were lunching on chapatis and rice.

"Very impressive," Stanley said. "I keep thinking of Scottish castles."

Mrs. Majumdar smiled and removed her dark glasses, but

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she remained under the canopy to protect her light pasty skin from the sun. "I can assure you, Stanley, when it comes to instruments of torture, the McLeods and the MacDonalds were rank amateurs compared to the Turks and the Mughals who occupied Daogiri. Why, the clan feuds seem child's play when you think of the massacres and butcheries the sultans perpetrated on their own kind, not to mention their unspeakable depredations on the rest of us. Take for example the infamous Muhammad bin Tughluq, who moved his entire court from Delhi to Daogiri on foot; do you know how he came to be sultan? He had his father trampled by a royal elephant!" She sent Abdullah to fetch water, and hissed in Stanley's ear, "the Moslems are a savage people, Stanley, utterly savage and without scruple. . . ." Her small eyes glittered brightly, her mouth tightly pursed; she drew the sari over her head and replaced her dark glasses. "The heat is unbearable today," she said, in a light, casual voice, and fanned herself with her purse as Abdullah returned with the water canteen.

The tremolo sound of a flute curled lazily upward through the noon silence, giving Stanley's spirits a needed lift.

"Come look, saab," Abdullah called from the parapet. He pointed down toward the Jain temple, on the terrace of which a group of villagers had gathered, dressed in gaily colored saris and turbans. Small in the distance, a lone figure stood on the edge of the terrace, where the bush began, and swayed rhythmically to the melody of his flute. Next to him on the ground lay a bundled figure.

"What is it, Abdullah?" asked Mrs. Majumdar.

"It is the snake wallah, memsahib."

"Is he performing now? What on earth for?" A peacock call blended in with the flute, which rose and fell like a candle guttering in the wind.

"Hey, what's going on?"

Stanley looked up at the bearded chin of the young Westerner, who leaned out from a demilune alcove ringed with small cannons.

"A snake charmer!" he called up.

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"Out of sight. Come look Jo—" he summoned his companion. "There's a crowd down there. A snake charmer doing his thing." His girlfriend's face appeared on the alcove, enveloped in a haze of marijuana.

"Faaar *out*!" she said.

The uniformed porter appeared and spoke rapidly to Abdullah, in apparent agitation. Stanley felt the sun beating down his neck, where the impress of the bat's claws still pricked his skin. The breezes had died down, and the heat was intense.

"*Hanh, hanh, hanh*," Abdullah punctuated the porter's recitation with emphatic nods of his head.

"What is it, Abdullah?" Mrs. Majumdar cut in, impatient. She refused to speak Marathi although she'd been in Aurangabad ten years. She spoke in English, and in Hindi to the servants, as a last resort.

"It's the village woman, memsahib. She has been bitten by a snake—a cobra. The snake wallah is trying to summon the cobra back. She is very ill."

"I don't understand. Haven't they taken her to a doctor? Surely they have supplies of snake serum in the village dispensary?"

Abdullah shrugged his shoulders, and the porter resumed his excited jabber.

"It seems the snake healer was not available," Abdullah said. "There was no one to recite the mantra."

Stanley listened intently, trying to catch key phrases in the exchange. Srilata had told him of snake healers who reputedly cured snake bite by the recitation of a simple phrase. She'd told him of one famous healer who cured snake-bite victims by telegram.

"You mean, " Mrs. Majumdar said, exasperated, "that this woman has not availed herself of the public medical services?"

"No, memsahib."

"But that is scandalous. I shall have to report this to the district medical officer." Mrs. Majumdar's features had visibly hardened; she donned her caste's attitude of disdain for the

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lower orders whenever Brahmin tenets of common sense were violated. She plumped down heavily on the chair and summoned the bearers with a clap of her hands. "To the frescoes, bearers. *Chalo chalo*."

The murals were drawn on the hidden inner face of a strip of rose-tinted sandstone, so smooth they appeared to be hand-polished. Nearly all were portraits of hindu *apsaras* or celestial maidens in attitudes of languorous contemplation and repose. One gazed dreamily into the heart of a long-stemmed lotus; another applied a *bindhi* to the center of her forehead, and still another lined her eyes with kohl. The last portrait was one of a full-blown yet willowy siren who gazed narcissus-like at her elegant breasts, and secretly smiled. The muted vegetable dyes seemed fresh and true, notwithstanding Abdullah's assurances that the frescoes dated from the fifteenth century, at the latest.

"These are linked to the Ajanta frescoes in period of execution," he said, "and they are older than the *apsaras* or courtesans of Sigiriya, in Sri Lanka, which are regarded to be poor imitations. During the Turkish and Mughal occupations these murals had been covered over with plaster, as they are offensive to the morals and religion of Islam." He grinned lasciviously. "I personally have no objection."

Stanley found the Daogiri maidens a refreshing surprise, after the medieval horrors of the tunnel and the oil-spouting gargoyles. Their firm, graceful breasts and soft pastel tints made them more natural and pleasing than many of the grapefruit-chested sculpted figures of Ajanta and Ellora. It did not matter overmuch that they might be far inferior as works of art. Shrewd Mrs. Majumdar had guessed right.

"One most interesting feature, saab." Abdullah pulled Stanley to one side, away from Mrs. Majumdar who dozed in her chair. "The walls on this end are covered with many many inscriptions left by visitors who have admired the beauty of these maidens. Some of them are very poetic. Others—" he lowered his voice, "others are offensive to the memsahib because of their frankness and fleshiness. Do you wish that I translate some of these for you?"

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"By all means," said Stanley. "Yes."

" 'I embrace the pink of your heavenly nipples'," Abdullah read in a half-whisper. " 'Concubines of the gods! I salute you with my erect lingam!' Sahib, here is one written by the great Turkish poet Hasan, who died in this fortress. It is dedicated, I believe, to Daogiri in days of old: 'The heavens are the anvil of the knocker on your door. Your gates are the eight gates of heaven. . .' "

A small boy ran up to Abdullah and shouted in English, "They have found it, they have found the cobra!" before he lapsed into Marathi.

Stanley stepped to the parapet and looked down at the crowd, which had grown in numbers although diminished to ant-size by the higher elevation. The thin flute melody was less distinct now; the flutist and the woman at his feet merged into a pinpoint of shimmering color. Rising heat waves made the entire scene dance before Stanley's eyes.

"What is it, Abdullah?" asked Mrs. Majumdar, waking from her midday nap. The snake incident had made her cross. "Is the woman dead yet?"

"Ah no, memsahib. The boy says they found the cobra. He has responded to the call of the snake wallah. They are now waiting to see if the cobra will bite the woman again, and draw out the poison."

"Ridiculous," she said. Her soft, plumpish features grew sharp as a hawk's. "Utter foolishness. I wish not to hear any more of this silly, superstitious stuff. Kindly inform the boy we will not be wishing any more communiqués." She dismissed them both with a wave of her hand and turned to Stanley with a smile that seemed almost tender.

"Well, Stanley, have the frescoes pleased you?"

"Yes, they're all right. The colors are lovely and the physical proportions seem natural and, if I may say so, more appealing, than the monumental bracket figures I have seen in Ellora."

"They're a curiosity, really," she said, "not in the main tradition of Indian mural art. Artistically, of course, they are far inferior to the Padmapani fresco in Ajanta, but they do have,

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I am inclined to agree, a certain ingenuous charm."

"That's well said," he allowed casually.

"Tell me, Stanley," she asked abruptly, "what is your opinion of contemporary Indian women? Do you find their physiques pleasing? I noticed you casting rather admiring glances at one of our young servant girls."

"Why yes—yes indeed. I find many Indian women very appealing—" He cleared his throat.

"But physically in particular?"

"Yee-es," Stanley stammered in confusion. Was this Brahmin candor?

"And you found my niece Srilata attractive—in the physical sense?"

"Why yes, exceptionally so." He rallied his wits. "But of course I do not separate that . . . aspect from the 'mental' and—" he choked back 'spiritual'—"other qualities I admire in her."

"But Srilata is rather too thin and tall to be altogether pretty, don't you think? She is not constructed on the grand scale of these *apsaras*, for example, or the Ellora sculptures."

He attempted levity. "I should hope not."

Mrs. Majumdar smoothed her sari over her heavy thighs and knees, then bent down with a sigh to refold the hem.

"Were you aware, Stanley, that the rector and myself acted as—I suppose you could say—go-betweens in arranging Srilata's engagement to Mr. Gupta?"

"No, I wasn't."

"It seemed to us at the time a very suitable match. Mr. Gupta comes of a Kashmiri Brahmin family with a background of Civil Service and university connections. Mr. Gupta himself is presently a District Collector in Mysore—a solid post, I might add, and he is clearly on the way up the ladder of the Public Service Commission."

"There is, I understand, some disparity in their ages?"

"Yes, there is. Mr. Gupta is seventeen years older than Srilata. But these age differences are not as important in India as they might seem in the West. We have a more leveling perspective."

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He said, "And Srilata has never met the gentleman, is that true?"

"They had a brief meeting in Delhi, and it was quite satisfactory to both parties. It is all very normal and proper procedure."

"Well, I find it a little puzzling."

"Well, of course, that is to be expected. You've been brought up in a romantic, Western tradition that glorifies 'love at first sight' and all that sort of thing. But do you truly believe your way to be superior to ours?"

"Perhaps not on a statistical basis. Aesthetically, yes, I think so."

She lifted her chin in the air and fanned herself vigorously. "Well, statistics, as you call it, interest me more, personally. And I feel quite certain that our arranged marriages provide no fewer of the creature comforts one expects from your Hollywood-style love-matches, which often as not end up in divorce and scandal and produce uprooted, distressed children. Now it is true the rector and myself have not been blessed with issue, but we have been happily and productively married for twenty-seven years, a record I don't imagine is matched by too many of your romantically-married acquaintances in the States. Tell me, Stanley, let us be candid with one another: Are your interests in Srilata primarily aesthetic? You admit you're attracted to her. What does this mean, precisely? Can you define your intentions?"

He was momentarily silenced by Mrs. Majumdar's bluntness, and by the memory of his last telephone exchange with Srilata. It struck him that the two might be connected, but he could not guess how. He played for time. "To be perfectly frank, Mrs. Majumdar, I'm not sure that I can."

Mrs. Majumdar unfolded her hands to adjust her glasses, and folded them again on her lap.

"I like you, Stanley, but I've suspected all along your modern ideas were lacking in maturity and overall perspective. Now I am certain of it. You Americans confuse material and carnal obsessions with a loose, casual affection you rather glibly call 'love.' True love is built up by two persons over a

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period of many years, and requires a mutuality of devotion and resolve; it is not a casual affection subject to the vagaries of good fortune and physical attractiveness. Srilata claims she sees in you a capacity for growth, for achieving in time a more stable balance between material desires and spiritual development. I have been observing you closely these past several days, and all I can say, my dear boy, is you have yet to convince *me* . . . now, let us put this discussion aside for the present. You must climb to the summit. You should see the Mughal cannon and the *Chini Mahal* or Princess's Palace, where dirty old Shah Jahan kept his unfortunate harem. Go on up, Stanley; I'll get down with these lazy bearers and await you by the car."

Stanley started up the last tier of steps as if in a trance. Every step turned into a question, adding to his confusion. What *was* going on in her head? Was his courtship of Srilata being revived without his knowledge? Mrs. Majumdar seemed a most unlikely cupid, given her dim views of Western marriages. But what was the point of all this angling and questioning? Was it a test of his seriousness? (He had underestimated Mrs. Majumdar.) The word 'marriage' had never come up with Srilata, and he shrank from it now. Even if he had grown to love Srilata, whatever that meant. He was soaked with perspiration, and his brow was burning hot . . . then a name welled up from the center of his turbulence, sharp and clear as a peacock's cry: Gupta! What about Gupta? And with it rose the suspicion that some calamity had overtaken the 39-year-old Collector of Mysore District: cholera, perhaps a lethal cobra bite, or a fatal fall from a high place . . . Or perhaps his family had called off the engagement over some imagined slight: a misunderstanding over the dowry, or maybe—his chest tightened—had they heard rumors of another suitor, a foreigner who cast a polluting shadow over their contract by his untimely intrusion? Had they found out about their fondling and kissing in the caverns behind Qutb Minar? His head reeled from the sun. He shut his eyes, steadied himself against the parapet and slapped his forehead twice. "This is July 29, 1973," he said

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aloud. "The hour is 12:39 P.M. I am in modern, post-Independence India, and the Prime Minister's name is Indira Gandhi. The President of the United States is Richard Milhous Nixon. . . ." He paused, sobered by the shocking factness of these syllables and looked up at the bleached, opaque sky.

A second vision of Tughluq passed through his mind's eye, this time on a royal elephant. The *mahout* was in livery, and the sultan's *howdah* decorated with exquisitely carved human bones. As they drifted by him, he saw that Tughluq was absorbed in a book of Kabir's poetry . . . and he understood that the parricidal tyrant was a thwarted mystic and ecstatic poet.

He climbed another bank of steps, but the elasticity was gone from his legs. He had lost all desire to reach the palace. A langur monkey sat atop the turret, profiled against a heavily-tooled cannon, and munched on a piece of chapati. The langur, an agreeable presence, regarded Stanley with unstudied aplomb. His squatting posture was an accurate copy of the lunch-break crouch of Mrs. Majumdar's bearers, except that his gray sideburns and whiskers gave the langur a magisterial dignity his human counterparts lacked.

The monkey finished his chapati, scratched his rectum leisurely, then ambled on all fours toward Stanley and extended his paw.

For an instant Stanley thought of giving the monkey a coin; then he emptied out his pockets to show him he had no food.

With supreme nonchalance, the monkey climbed back atop the turret and resumed scratching himself.

"Saab, saab—" He felt a tug at his sleeve. For an instant he thought it was another beggar monkey; but a small boy stood before him in a long khaki shirt that revealed his brown penis.

"Saab, a message from Abdullah. He says the snake has come and bitten the woman and out comes the poison. She has regained con—con—"

"Consciousness," he supplied.

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"*Hanh*." The boy nodded vigorously. "Abdullah says not to tell the memsahib." He turned and skittered down the stairs like a mouse.

"Incredible!" Stanley exclaimed. "That is absolutely incredible." He leaned far over the parapet to look for the crowd. Swallows darted and dived below him. He could now see far beyond the walls of the compound to the jagged silhouette of the distant *ghats*, gray as the rock he stood on, and as barren of real life. He strained to hear the flute, but heard only an occasional peacock's cry.

He squeezed inside the narrow sentry's turret, which smelled of monkey excrement. By stretching far forward on his toes he could look past the lower galleries and artillery emplacements at the villagers gathered on the temple terrace; he could no longer pick out the flutist or the woman from the blurred, amorphous mass. He leaned farther still and caught an updraft of cool air, sweet with the scent of incense. At that precise moment he swooped down on swallow wings, as if the leash of his body had broken at last, and he was there, among the attending family members and friends. He saw clearly the village woman's drawn, pain-wracked face, although it was covered with gray *purdah*. He observed himself lift the woman's covered head gently and cradle it in his arms, as the poison ebbed and the life returned to her body. He was more than just a witness to her recovery. Even now his life's blood flowed into her veins, returning color to her face. He lifted the hood and looked into Srilata's limpid brown eyes, glowing with gratitude and love.

All at once he knew why he had come to India. His melancholy and his fretful sensuality disguised far stronger and finer emotions. He had felt unworthy of Srilata, whom he had come to regard as a superior being. For almost two years he had been a chrysalis, subsisting on the accumulations within his cocoon as he prepared his transformation. Now, with Srilata's love and guidance, his metamorphosis would be complete. Afterward, they would come together as peers. One of their favorite games was imagining themselves as members of a utopian community of thirty-six, each of whom

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practiced a seminal skill or vocation. Srilata had envisioned herself, alternately, as a story-teller and a sybil. The first time she asked him what part he would play he had answered unhesitantly, "healer."

"Then you have missed your calling," she had teased him. "You seem to have made a virtue of going against your karma."

He admitted to her that ever since he could remember his parents had expected him to study medicine. When he took history instead, his mother's disappointment had been so keen she had not spoken to him for two years.

"Hey, man, what happened to the woman?" He looked up past the turret at the young Western couple, who stood on the just visible edge of a marble pavilion.

"She is going to live," he called up. "The snake bit her again and drew out the poison."

"Are you putting me on?" the young man asked. After a silence, he called, "Man, you have to come up and see this place. It's like a small Taj Mahal"—but Stanley was already bounding down the stairs.

"No more death," he shouted, taking two steps at a time. "No—more—death."

Abdullah awaited him by the frescoes, subdued and solemn. "The woman is dead, sahib," he said. "They were too late."

Stunned, Stanley leaned over the parapet. The terrace was now empty.

"They have taken the woman back to the village, for funeral ceremonies."

"It was only minutes ago the boy told me—"

"Ah yes," Abdullah nodded mournfully. "That was a false rumor, sahib. The woman died an hour ago."

IV

They met Mrs. Majumdar at the gate. She had been told of the woman's death by the gateman, and had decided to pay a visit on the survivors.

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"Abdullah," she announced peremptorily, "we will go to the village and see what can be done for these people."

Abdullah demurred, and nervously rubbed the back of his neck. "If I may be permitted an opinion, memsahib, the Moslem funeral ceremonies are very crowded and noisy. I am concerned that the memsahib and the American sahib may find them upsetting—"

"Nonsense." Her altruistic instincts had been aroused, and would not be shunted aside. "Naturally, we will not disrupt the mourners. I intend to leave a small sum of money in a responsible hand for the children."

"Acha, memsahib. I shall be most honored to act as your emissary in this delicate mission of—"

"I said in a *responsible* hand, Abdullah, so you can save your breath. I am well aware of how you squander the generous salary we pay you on wine, women and song. Now, let us get on to the village. We needn't go all the way in."

"Acha, memsahib," Abdullah said in a low voice. He shot Stanley a weighted look. "This will end badly," his eyes seemed to say.

The narrow mud lanes of the village bazaar were deserted. The small black Ambassador crept like a tank between the low brown hovels and burlap-shaded tea stalls, and entered the empty square. It was market day, and bands of chickens roamed freely among the pariah dogs and the cows. Brimming baskets of lentils, grains and bright red chilis lined the square, unattended. The smells of India were heavy in the air; cow-dung smoke, sweat, sandalwood, stale urine, incense and excrement—the eternal, rancid brew of sweetness and decay that had driven him at last from the Punjabi village—and from himself.

They drove past the square into another twisting lane, which opened into a field of wheat, parched and withered by the summer sun. A small, ruined mosque was stranded in the middle of the field, forlorn and empty except for a peacock roosting brilliantly atop its onion dome.

"It appears this is not the village," Abdullah said. "Perhaps we turn back?"

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But Mrs. Majumdar instructed him to drive on to a distant huddle of mud huts. They bumped along the bullock-cart road until the sound of drums and voices reached them. Suddenly a procession appeared, as if from nowhere. Four tall, dhoti-clad men in bright turbans carried a bier decked with garlands of jasmine, marigolds and white lilies and other scented flowers. They chanted a dirge-like song in cadence with their long, powerful strides, as a small boy trailing behind them banged two sticks together. An even smaller boy beat on a drum as he struggled to keep pace.

"Ah, these must be the pallbearers," Mrs. Majumdar said. "Follow them, Abdullah. They will lead us to the place."

Abdullah turned around. "Memsahib—"

"Do as you're told."

Now it was Stanley's turn to feel foreboding. The car crept along the rutted mud road behind the chanting pallbearers, who peered over their shoulders with angry, menacing looks.

"Ah, there it is," said Mrs. Majumdar, as the bearers turned a corner, and they heard piercing shrieks and low wails. Mrs. Majumdar opened her purse and pulled out two five-rupee bills, which she folded carefully. The car turned the corner behind the bearers, and they were in the midst of the funeral. Hundreds of people—the entire village—were gathered in a tight mass, howling and wailing like a wounded beast. At the further perimeter six or seven women stood above the mob, on a platform or rise of ground; they shrieked and tore at their *purdah*, revealing grief-twisted faces. Two priests on their left made sharp clacking noises with wooden clappers, as clouds of dust swirled around them.

Dazed, Stanley kept his eyes on the four pallbearers, who entered the inner circle of mourners. He could not see the corpse. An elderly woman rose suddenly from the center of the circle and tore off her hood, then howled and beat at her chest as two young men tried to restrain her. An older man, who wailed and struck at his temples with clenched fists, sagged on the shoulders of two girls with kohl-streaked faces.

"Abdullah!" Mrs. Majumdar shouted above the uproar, "go inquire where the woman's family is. Which are her chil-

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dren?"

Transfixed, Abdullah made no reply until she poked his shoulder with the folded bills.

"Give this to the woman up there; the one with the torn hood must be the deceased's mother. Tell her it is for her grandchildren. Abdullah, can you hear me? I-want-to-see-you-place-these-bills-in-her-hand."

He nodded distractedly, took the bills in his fist without looking back and stepped out of the car stealthily.

Stanley watched Abdullah shoulder his way through the mass of mourners, who offered stiffening resistance as he approached the circle of keening women. The pallbearers had reached the high ground and lifted a silken bundle high in the air. It disappeared, then reappeared on top of the bier, above the heads of the bearers, as the shrieks and wails rose to a demented pitch.

Stanley shrank into his seat, afraid. His curiosity was spent. Never in his life had he felt such an intruder; and it was not only the funeral or the village, or even India that made him an alien, defiling presence; his very existence was the offender.

"All because of this stupid woman," he muttered, in a surge of anger. He was being robbed of his metamorphosis.

As Abdullah neared the circle of mourners a man turned on him and berated him furiously. Abdullah held the bills high, pointing them at the elderly woman while holding his cap in place with his free hand. Then one of the pallbearers leaped forward, tall, as if standing on someone's shoulders, and he too began to harangue Abdullah, flailing both fists before his face. Abdullah's gestures, which had been directed at the old woman, now turned toward the car, as he pointed the folded bills at the rector's wife.

"That stupid man," Mrs. Majumdar said, with a tremor in her voice. "He is muddling it all up."

"Perhaps," Stanley said stonily, "they don't understand your generosity."

Suddenly there was silence. The keeners stopped their shrieks and wails. The wooden noisemakers fell silent. Even

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the clouds of dust appeared to settle, exposing the scene to the full force of the sun.

The pallbearer now gestured animatedly to the old woman, pointing to the folded bills in Abdullah's raised fist.

A howl tore the silence—a sound more shattering and unearthly than any Stanley had heard until now.

The woman flung her gray hood across her face, seized the bills from Abdullah's hands, ripped them to pieces and threw them into the air. She shouted a lengthy harangue at Abdullah, and then at the car, jabbing her arm repeatedly.

Mrs. Majumdar's back stiffened. "Why of all the ungrateful—" she began, then stopped, as the mourners turned in their direction.

Stanley looked among the faces for Abdullah, their last protection. He wanted to call to him, appeal to the kinship they had shared on the rock, but his heart was pounding and his mouth was sour and dry. He finally saw the gray woolen cap, bobbing up from the middle of the crowd. Abdullah was shouting, raising both arms in the air. Impossible to tell if he was pacifying the mob, or if he had gone to their side and was shouting grievances against his Hindu employer.

Several men detached themselves from the edges of the crowd and moved toward the car with clenched fists and angry faces, as the woman's shrieks continued to lash at them.

Stanley's first impulse was to leap out of the car and flee across the field, but when he opened the door he saw a knot of villagers behind him, cutting off his escape.

"Shut the window!" he shouted at Mrs. Majumdar, who sat paralyzed, with her hands folded on her lap and her eyes fixed on the shrieking women. He leaned over her shoulder to roll up her window and press the lock. Then he lurched forward to roll up the window and lock the door on the driver's side. He locked his own rear door just as the fists began to pound on the roof and the hood.

"My god, my god, what is happening?" Mrs. Majumdar said, almost whimpering; then, in a firm voice she said: "I shall report his disgraceful behavior, do you hear?" And she

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swatted at the window with the top of her sari.

"We are about to be lynched," Stanley yelled, "and all because of your stupid meddling!"

"This shall be reported, do you hear?" she screamed at the windshield, which was a blur of faces and fists. "The rector shall hear of this impudence!"

"But I am innocent," Stanley said softly, as if to himself. Then louder, "I am an innocent American tourist!"

But even in his rising panic he recognized the absurdity of his words. He no longer was either innocent or a tourist.

A wave of relief flooded him, and long-buried passions rose to his throat. He began to yell and pound at the window in response to the shouts of the villagers, as the car rocked like a boat at sea.

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Majumdar shouted, but he pushed her roughly aside.

"Stay on the floor, you old shrew!" he yelled at her. "Stay down on the floor, where you belong!"

He turned to the contorted faces at the window, his eyes glowing with ecstasy. They were his deliverers. They were delivering him from his fear of death, of Srilata, of life itself.

"We are brothers!" he screamed. "We are brothers! I am coming out to join you."

He lifted the button and pushed at the door, but the weight of the bodies kept it shut. He pushed again, and it flew open. He was yanked out by his arms and one leg, as he shouted, "We are brothers!" at the top of his voice.

A fist hit him on the side of the face and opened a cut from which blood flowed at once. He extended both arms to his attackers, shouting, "Brother! My deliverer!" The fists of the villagers rained on his head and body.

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ROBERT CUMMING

DRAWINGS

1. Falling Water
2. Dividers Sprint
3. Prow Projection
4. Hirschfield Palette
5. Silhouette the Width of a Brick
6. Comma with Snapped Comma Tail
7. Whittled Beam
8. Whittled Head Plan
9. Complex Cup
10. Complex Cup
11. Complex Cup
12. Complex Cup
13. Double Floats
14. House at Foot of Earthen Dam
15. Falling Leaf
16. Fire for Light; not Heat
17. Constellation
18. Helix-Cone Timepiece
19. Constellation
20. Three Curvatures

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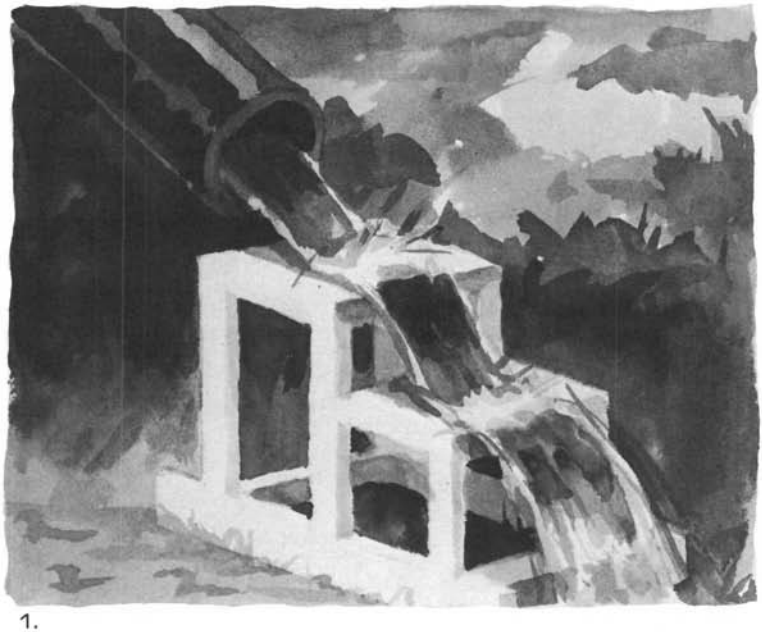

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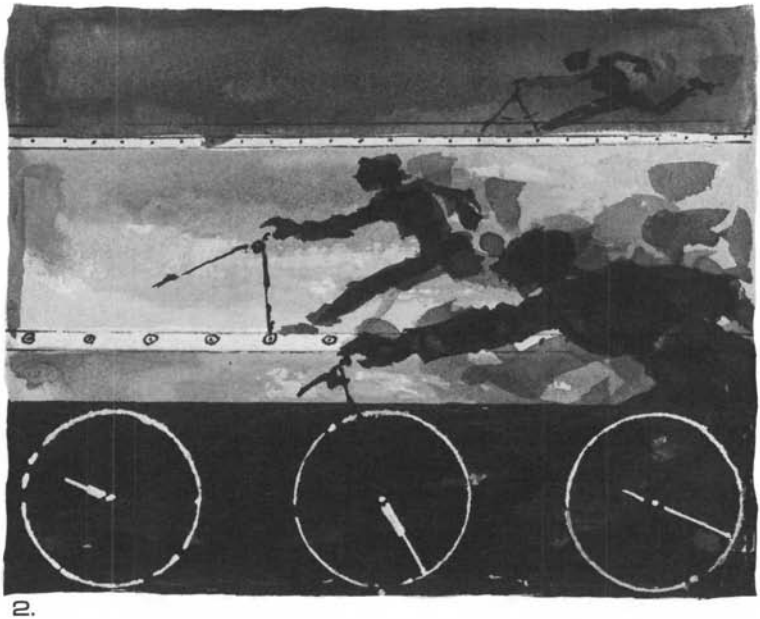

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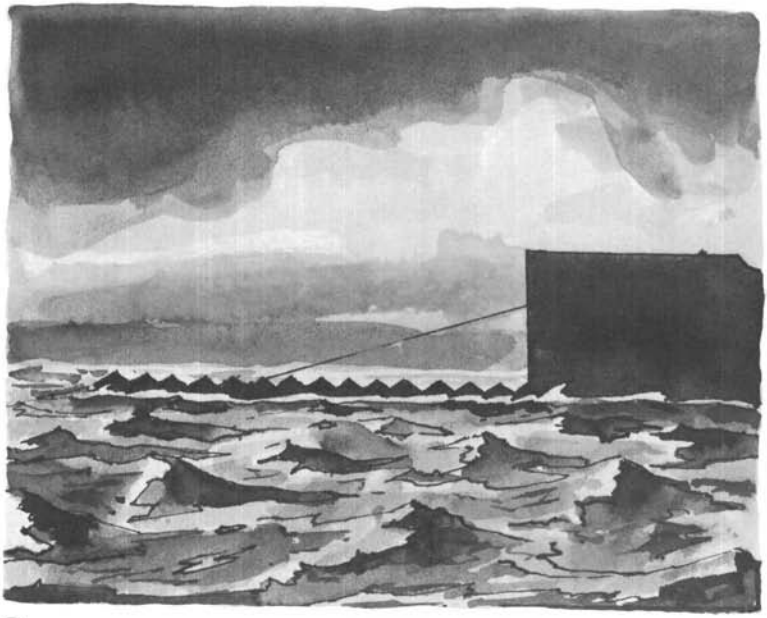

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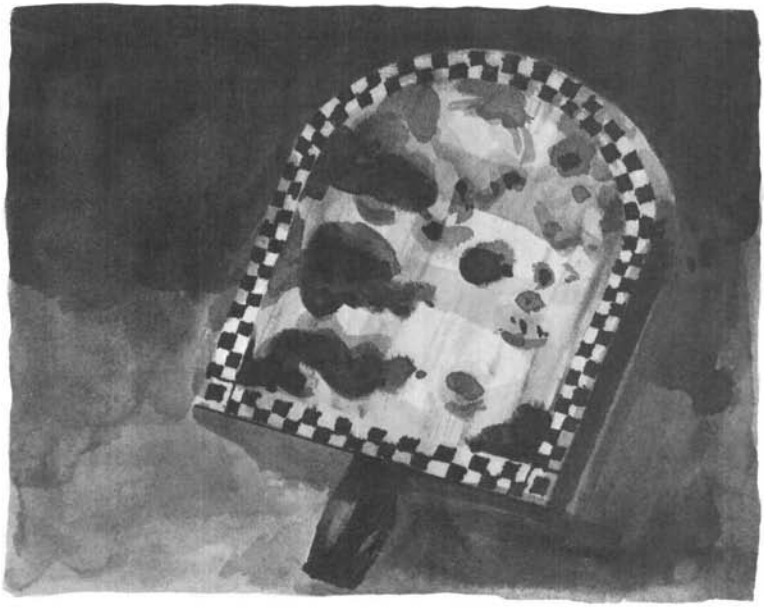

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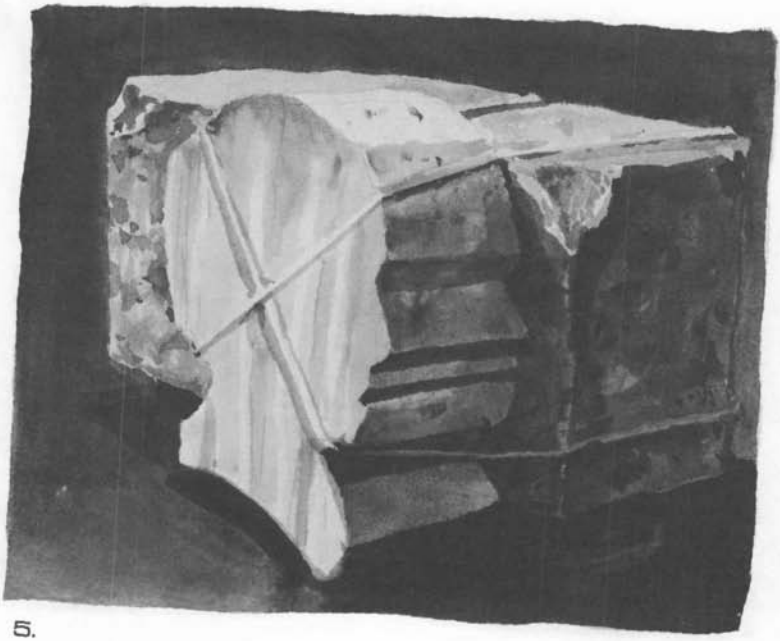

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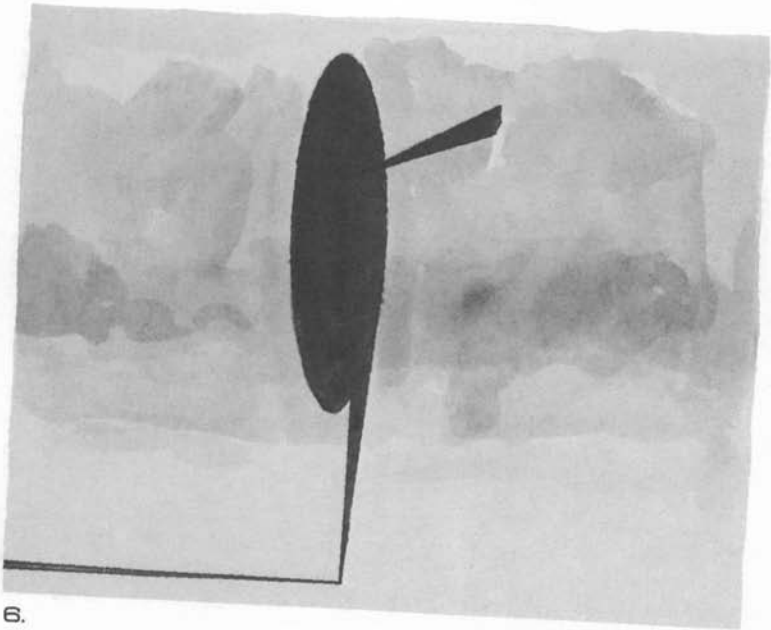

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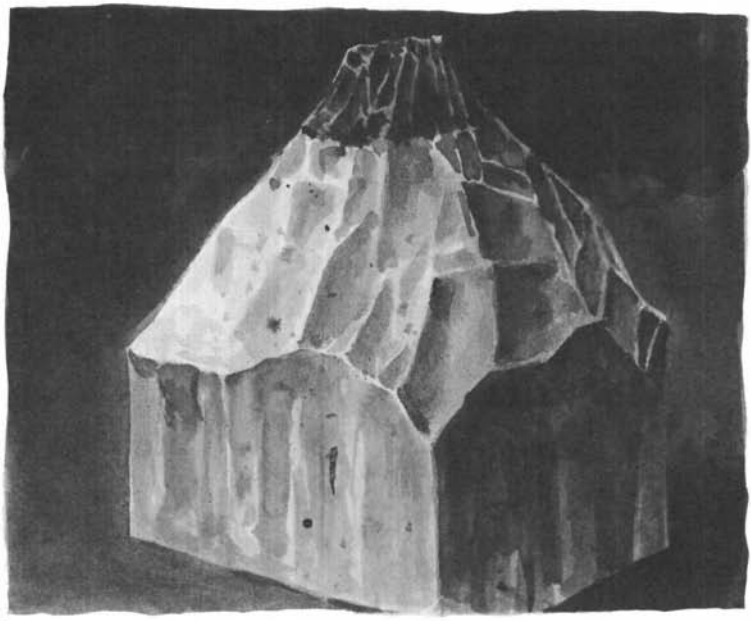

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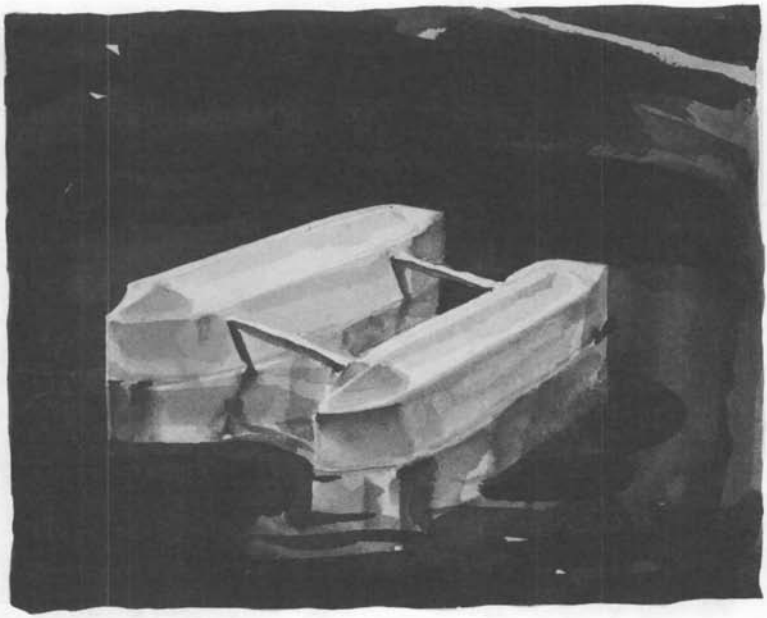

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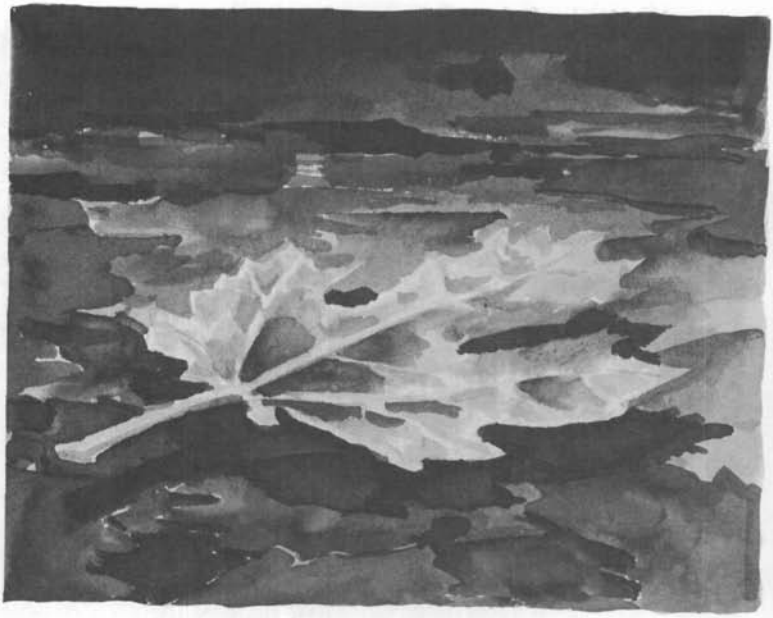

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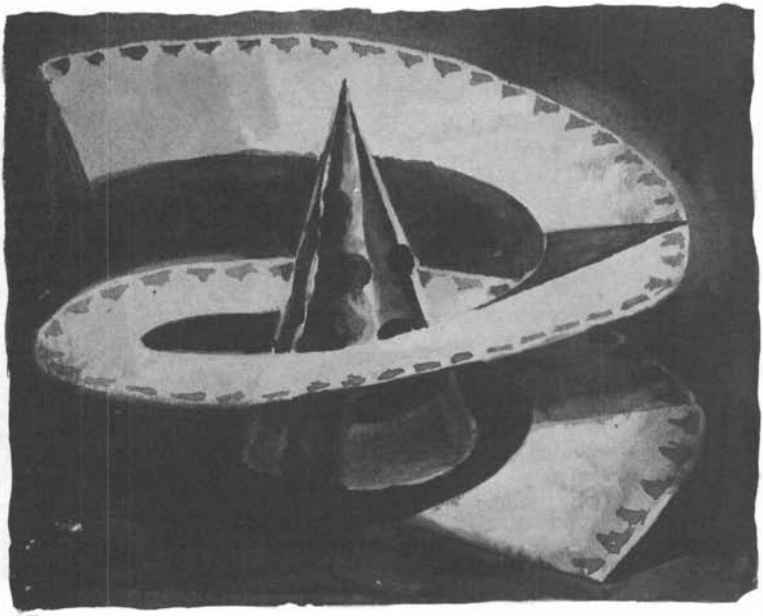

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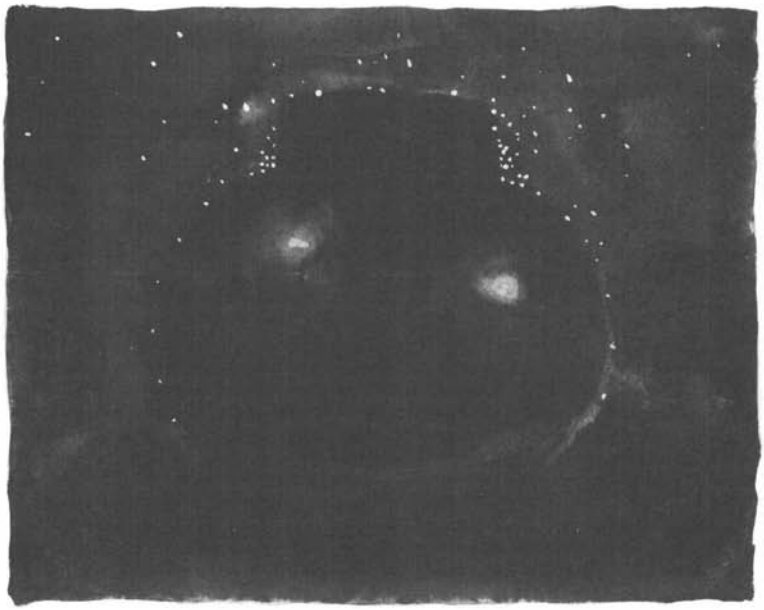

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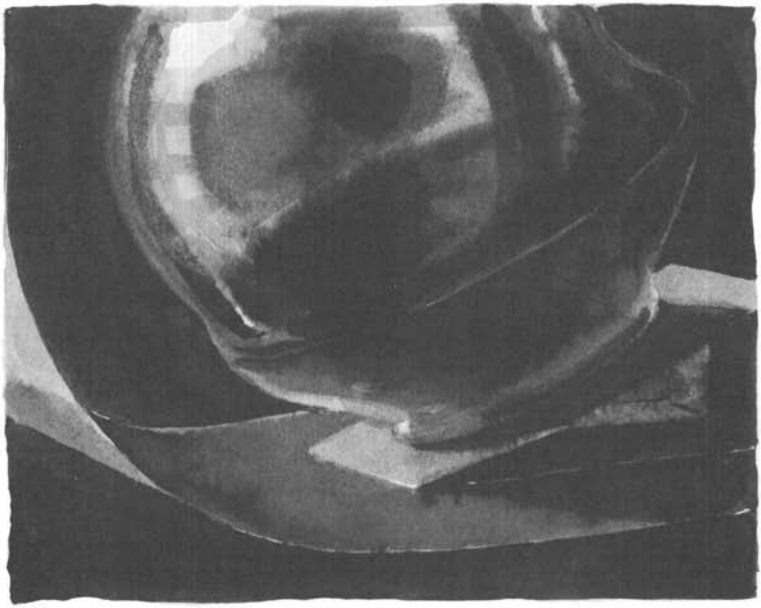

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Frank Bidart

CONFESSIONAL

Is she dead?

Yes, she is dead.

Did you forgive her?

No, I didn't forgive her.

Did she forgive you?

No, she didn't forgive me.

What did you have to forgive?

She was never mean, or willfully
cruel, or unloving.

When I was eleven, she converted to Christ—

she began to simplify her life, denied
herself, and said that she and I must struggle

"to divest ourselves
of the love of CREATED BEINGS,"—

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and to help me to do that,

one day

she hanged my cat.

I came home from school, and in the doorway
of my room,

my cat was hanging strangled.

She was in the bathroom; I could hear
the water running.

—I shouted at her;

she wouldn't
come out.

She was in there
for hours, with the water running . . .

Finally, late that night,
she unlocked the door.

She wouldn't look at me.

She said that we must learn to rest
in the LORD,—

and not in His CREATION . . .

Did you forgive her?

Soon, she had a breakdown;
when she got out of the hospital,

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she was SORRY . . .

For years she dreamed the cat
had dug
its claws into her thumbs:—

in the dream, she knew, somehow,
that it was dying; she tried

to help it,—

TO PUT IT OUT OF ITS MISERY,—

so she had her hands around its
neck, strangling it . . .

Bewildered,

it looked at her,

KNOWING SHE LOVED IT—;

and she *DID* love it, which was
what was
so awful . . .

All it could do was
hold on,—
. . . AS
SHE HELD ON.

Did you forgive her?

I was the center of her life,—
and therefore,
of her fears and obsessions. They changed;

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one was money.

. . . DO I HAVE TO GO INTO IT?

Did you forgive her?

Standing next to her coffin, looking down
at her body, I suddenly
knew I hadn't—;

over and over
I said to her,

I didn't forgive you!
I didn't forgive you!

I *did* love her . . . Otherwise,

would I feel so guilty?

What did she have to forgive?

She was SORRY. She *tried*
to change . . .

She loved me. She was generous.

I pretended
that I had forgiven her—;

and she pretended
to believe it,—

she needed desperately to believe it . . .

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SHE KNEW I COULD BARELY STAND TO BE
AROUND HER.

Did you forgive her?

I *tried*—;
for years I almost
convinced myself I did . . .

But no, I didn't.

—Now, after I have said it all, so I can
rest,

will you give me ABSOLUTION,—

. . . and grant this
"created being"

FORGIVENESS? . . .

Did she forgive you?

I think she tried—;
but no,—
she *couldn't* forgive me . . .

WHY COULDN'T SHE FORGIVE ME?

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Don't you understand even now?

No! Not—not really . . .

Forgiveness doesn't exist.

II

She asked,—

and I could not, WOULD NOT give . . .

—That is the first of two sentences
I can't get out of my head.

They somehow contain what happened.

The second is:—

THERE WAS NO PLACE IN NATURE WE COULD MEET.

Can you explain them?

Augustine too

had trouble with his mother,—

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. . . LISTEN.

Confessor
incapable of granting "*rest*" or "*absolution*," —

LISTEN . . .

Why are you angry?

Augustine too

had trouble with his mother, —

but the story of Augustine and Monica
is the *opposite* of what happened

between me and my mother . . .

We couldn't meet in Nature, —

. . . AND ALL WE HAD WAS NATURE.

How do you explain it?

The scene at the window at Ostia
in Book Nine of the *Confessions*

seems designed to make non-believers

sick with envy . . .

— You are listening to a soul
that has *always* been

SICK WITH ENVY . . .

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How do you explain it?

As a child I was (now, I
clearly can see it)

PREDATORY,—

pleased to have supplanted my father
in my mother's affections,

and then pleased to have supplanted my stepfather . . .

—I assure you, though I was a "*little boy*,"
I could be far more charming, sympathetic,
full of sensibility, "*various*," far more
an understanding and feeling
ear for my mother's emotions, needs, SOUL

than any man, any man she met,—

I know I *wanted* to be: WANTED
to be the center, the focus of her life . . .

I was her ally against my father;
and then, after the first two or three

years, her ally against my stepfather . . .

—Not long before she died,
she told me something
I had never heard,—

when I was nine or ten, early
in her second marriage,

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she became pregnant; she said she
wanted to have the child . . .

She said that one day, when my stepfather
was playing golf, she was out walking the course

with him, and suddenly

a man fell from one of the huge trees
lining the fairways . . .

A group of men had been cutting limbs;
she saw one of them fall,
and for a long time

lie there screaming.

Later that day, she had a miscarriage . . .

—After saying all this, she
looked at me insistently and said,

"*I wanted to have the child.*"

But as she was telling me the story,
I kept thinking

THANK GOD THE MAN FELL,
THANK GOD SHE SAW HIM FALL AND HAD A
MISCARRIAGE

AND THE CHILD DIED . . .

—I felt sick. I knew I was *GLAD*
the man fell, *GLAD* she saw him fall

and the child died . . .

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—When I was nine or ten, if she
had had a child—; if

she and a child and my stepfather
had made a FAMILY

from which I *had* to be closed off,
the remnant of a rejected, erased past,—

(I never had anything in common with,
or even RESPECTED, my stepfather,—)

I would have gone crazy . . .

—How could she have *BETRAYED ME*
in that way? . . .

How do you explain it?

I felt sick. I felt ill at how
PREDATORY I was,—

(my feelings *STILL* were,—)

at the envy and violence I could
will NOT to feel,

but *COULDN'T* not feel . . .

—Augustine has the temerity, after
his mother dies,

to admit he is GLAD
she no longer wanted to be buried

next to her husband . . .

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He thanks God
for ridding her of this "vain desire."

Why are you angry?

In the words of Ecclesiastes:—

"Her loves, her hates, her jealousies,—
these all

have perished, nor will she EVER AGAIN

TAKE PART
in whatever is done under the sun . . ."

My mother,—

. . . *JUST DIED.*

The emotions, the "*issues*" in her life
didn't come out somewhere, reached no culmination,
climax, catharsis,—

she *JUST DIED.*

She wanted them to—;
how can I talk about

the way in which, when I was young,

we seemed to be engaged in an ENTERPRISE
together,—

the enterprise of "figuring out the world,"
figuring out her life, my life,—

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THE MAKING OF HER SOUL,

which somehow, in our "enterprise"
together, was the making of my soul,—

. . . it's a kind of *CRAZINESS*, which some mothers
drink along with their children
in their *MOTHER'S-MILK* . . .

Why are you angry?

THERE WAS NO PLACE IN NATURE WE COULD MEET . . .

—I've never let anyone else
in so deeply . . .

But when the predatory complicit co-conspirator
CHILD

was about twenty, he of course wanted his "*freedom*,"—

and then he found

that what had made his life
possible, what he found so deeply INSIDE HIM,

had its hands around his neck,
strangling him,—

and that therefore, if he were
to survive,

he must in turn strangle, murder,
kill it inside him . . .

TO SURVIVE, I HAD TO KILL HER INSIDE ME.

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Why are you angry?

Now that she is dead (that her BODY
is DEAD),

I'm capable of an "*empathy*,"

an "*acceptance*" of the INEVITABLE
(in her, and in myself)

that I denied her, living . . .

I DENIED HER, LIVING.

She asked,—

and I could not, WOULD NOT give . . .

I *did* "will" to forgive her, but

FORGIVENESS lay beyond the will,—

. . . *and I willed NOT to forgive her*,
for "forgiveness" seems to say:—

Everything is forgotten, obliterated,—
the past
is as nothing, erased . . .

Her plea, her need for forgiveness
seemed the attempt to obliterate

the ACTIONS, ANGERS, DECISIONS

that *made me* what I am . . .

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To obliterate the CRISES, FURIES, REFUSALS
that are how I
came to *UNDERSTAND* her—; me—;

my life . . .

Truly to feel "forgiveness,"
to forgive her *IN MY HEART*,

meant erasing *ME* . . .

—She seemed to ask it to render me paralyzed,
and defenseless . . .

Now that I no longer must face her,
I give her in my mind

the "*empathy*" and "*acceptance*"

I denied her, living.

Why are you angry?

. . . But if, somehow, WHAT WE WERE
didn't have to be understood

by MEMORY,

and THIS EARTH,—

. . . Augustine and Monica,

as they lean
alone together standing at a window

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overlooking a garden at the center of the house
(in Book Nine of the *Confessions*),

near the time of her death (which time,
Augustine says, GOD knew,

though they did not),—

resting here at Ostia from a long journey
by land,

and preparing for a long sea-journey
back to the Africa which is their home,—

. . . as they stand here sweetly talking together,
and ask

"what the eternal life of the saints could be"

(panting to be sprinkled from the waters of God's fountain
to help them meditate
upon so great a matter),—

. . . as they stand alone together
at this window,

they can FORGET THE PAST

AND LOOK FORWARD

TO WHAT LIES BEFORE THEM . . .

—They had much to forget;

in the *Confessions*, Monica's ferocity
is frightening:—

before Augustine became a Christian,
she saw him as dead—;

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she refused to live with him or even
eat at the same table in his house,
shunning and detesting his blasphemies,—

until she had a dream in which she
learned that he would finally convert to Christ . . .

—When he planned to leave Africa for Italy,
she was determined he would take her
with him, or remain at home;

she followed him to the seacoast,
clinging to him, he says, with "*dreadful grief*";

one night he escaped,
and sailed,—

not long after, she followed . . .

—Finally, of course, he became a Christian;
until then, she
ceaselessly wept and mourned and prayed . . .

Do you know why you are saying all this?

As Augustine and Monica stood leaning at that
window in Ostia, contemplating

what the saints' possession of God is like,

they moved past and reviewed
(Augustine tells us)

each level of created things,—

each level of CREATION, from this earth
to the sun and moon and stars

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shining down on this earth . . .

—Talking, musing, wondering
at Creation, but knowing that our life and light

here cannot compare

to the sweetness of the saints' LIGHT and LIFE,—

(here, where he had forced her to *SEEK*
what out of her body she had herself

brought forth,—)

. . . now, self-gathered at last in the purity of their own
being, they ascend higher

still, and together SCALE THE STARS . . .

—And so, Augustine tells us, they came to their own Souls,—

and then went
past them, to that region of richness

unending, where God feeds ISRAEL forever
with the food of Truth . . .

There LIFE is the WISDOM
by which all things are made, which

itself is *not* made . . .

—While they were thus talking of, straining to comprehend,
panting for this WISDOM, with all the effort

of their heart, for one heartbeat,

they together attained to *touch* it—;

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. . . then sighing, and leaving the first-fruits
of their Spirit bound there,

they returned to the sound of their own voice,—
to WORDS,

which have a beginning and an end . . .

"How unlike," Augustine says, "God's WORD,—
changeless, self-gathered, unmade, yet forever

making all things new . . ."

How do you explain it?

Then they said:—
"If any man could shut his ears

to the tumult of the flesh—;

if suddenly the cacophony
of earth and sea and air

were SILENT, and the voice of the self
died to the self, and so the self

found its way beyond the self,—

beyond the SELF it has made,—

SILENT
our expiations and confessions,
the voice that says: *NO REMISSION OF SINS*
WITHOUT THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD,

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the WORD that was only given us drenched in blood,—

. . . if to any man

his Self, CREATION ITSELF

(Substance and Accidents and their Relations)

suddenly were SILENT,—

and in that silence,

he then heard CREATION

say with one voice:—

We are not our own source,—

even those of us

who made ourselves, creatures
of the Will, the Mirror, and the Dream,

know we are not our own source,—

. . . if he heard this voice,

and then

all Creation were, even for a second, SILENT,—

(this Creation in which creatures
of consciousness,

whose LAW is that they come to be
through CHANGE, through
birth, fruition, and death,

know that as they move toward fullness
of being, they move toward ceasing to be,—)

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. . . if in this SILENCE,

He whom we *crave* to hear

SPOKE AT LAST—;

spoke not through the VEIL
of earth and sea and air,

thunder, 'SIGNS AND WONDERS,' the voice
of an angel, the enigma of similitude and of

parable, all

the ALIEN that BESETS us here,—

. . . spoke not by them, but by HIMSELF,

calling us to return into that secret place from
which He

comes forth at last to us,—

. . . just as we two
together reached forth and for one

heartbeat attained to *TOUCH*

the *WISDOM* that is our *SOURCE* and *GROUND*,—

. . . if this could continue, and LIFE
were that one moment of
wisdom and understanding

for which we then sighed,—

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would not *this* be: *ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD*? . . .

And when shall it be? At
the Resurrection of the Dead, when all
shall rise, but not all shall be changed?

And shall *we* then be changed? . . ."

In words like these, but not
exactly these, (Augustine then says,)

they talked together that day—

(just as the words I have given you are
not, of course, exactly Augustine's).

Monica then said,
"Son, I no longer hope

for anything from this world.

I wanted to stay alive long enough
to see you a Catholic Christian.

God has granted me this, in
superabundance.

. . . What am I still doing here?"

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In five days, she fell into a fever;
nine days later she was dead.

Why are you angry?

My mother, at the end of her life, was *frightened.*

She was afraid to die
not because she feared an afterlife,

but because she didn't know what her life had been.

Her two marriages were failures,—

she stayed married to my stepfather, but
in despair, without trust in or respect for him, or

visible affection . . .

She had had no profession,—

she had painted a few paintings, and
written a handful of poems, but without the illusion

either were any good, or STOOD FOR HER . . .

She had *MADE* nothing.

I was what she had made.—

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She saw that her concern and worry and care
in the end called up in me

protestations of affection
that veiled

unappeasable anger, and remorse.

UNDOING THIS was beyond me . . .

She felt she was here for some REASON,—
. . . but never found it.

Man needs a metaphysics;
he cannot have one.

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The Ninth Life

Murray Pomerance

For what our friend Madame de Rocattefours, herself gaining all simplicities with age, calculated to be almost a month, the cat had been languishing; as the days flooded with spring and nervously passed it took pleasure in sitting to watch the light stream through the bank of laced windows, its nostrils flaring and acquiescing. All of the cat's ribs were visible by now, and they quivered when it heaved to take in air like the run strings of a warped harp. The cat paid no attention to people now. The parlor maid took care to sweep around it when it did not move. The maid swept carefully beneath the sofa in the living room, where the cat crawled in the late afternoons. All through the prolongation of sunset the cat would be crawling in the direction of the sofa, breathing almost with despair. The scullery maid discovered that the cat could be urged to nibble on tiny morsels of very well-cooked egg yolk. When Mme. de Rocattefours was informed of this, she immediately took heart and made conversation of the cat's eagerness to everyone who visited for coffee. From Mme. de

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Rocattefours herself the cat was inspired to take several drops of fresh cream. At dinnertime, the cat could be seen stepping purposefully toward the bathroom and pausing frequently to set its breath again.

To pass time, Mme. de Rocattefours did several small pastels. One she sent to the mayor of the nearest village (Fourques), a rotund man with four hounds. He, a widower, childless, came always to be with Mme. de Rocattefours in the afternoons on Wednesday and Friday; and she had tea for him but quite regularly took no liquids herself. They had pleasant chats, trying to keep away from memories of the past, and if he had been fishing he would make sure to bring something. The miraculous recovery of the cat came up. "It was pneumonia," she told him, and he touched his white moustache and poured a great deal of milk in his tea, in the custom, and then raised his eyes to her but she told him, "Oh no, no." The cat lay in a yard of sun on the floor beside the table at which they were sitting, with its eyes closed and its mouth somewhat tight. Of the three recent pastels Mme. de Rocattefours brought out to show the mayor, he liked best a simple sketch of an enclosure in the grand mustard pasture. "But you should see how well my niece draws," the old lady said to him absently.

The night was one of those starless and dark ones. Water vapor from the warm dining room condensed into an etching of beads and spaces, the beads catching light dully, on the cold window. Patrice kept her sketch pad tilted toward her bosom. "What are you drawing now?" Mme. de Rocattefours asked. The girl used her pencil idly and tapped her foot. "She's just like you used to be, you know," said Mme. de Rocattefours, looking toward the cat; the cat lay in the center of the floor breathing in shallow sibilant concentrations. "Looks meager and skinny—you know—but she's not. She's not at all—you know—really. She's tough." Patrice did not look up from her drawing. "I'll bet you're drawing the cat, she's an old fighter. Not like Wilhelmina—as much charm as she had, she didn't have any strength really; but this one's an

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aristocrat. When Kupel saw Wilhelmina he said right off the bat she'd never make it. I had to bring her back there four times and he said he didn't know why I was taking so much trouble. You know, these guys don't understand." Mme. de Rocattefours finished one cigarette and took another in a movement that was continuous; she had managed to surround her head with a cloud of the smoke that took a purple cast of light. "I'm just an old curiosity-killed-the-cat," the old lady said, rather indistinguishably, "Are you drawing my baby?"

With a curtsey Patrice offered her aunt the drawing she had made. It was a small figure of the cat on a large page, scrawled quickly with charcoal and then touched lightly with the fingertips in what seemed a graceful and calculated swirling motion. The drawing had the cat on its back, its four legs elevated practically in perpendiculars. Mme. de Rocattefours laughed. "It looks like smokestacks," she said, smiling wrily. Mme. de Rocattefours poured a glass of vermouth and put it in front of the young girl. "That's a funny one," she said to her. "Here. You'll be needing this too."

The cat must have died in the middle of the night, for it was dead when they got up in the morning. Patrice got up before her aunt, and when she went to the bathroom to clean her teeth and to the kitchen to heat the coffee and to the veranda finally to drink it with steamed milk she did not see the cat on the floor trying to breathe. She did not want to look under the sofa, where the cat went at night to be in the dark. She drank her coffee slowly and watched how the trees in the road, though they had no leaves yet, moved their branches more carefully now than they had in the depth of winter. There was a bottle of lime marmalade from Spain and she put some of it on a piece of yesterday's bread. She thought it would be all right to have a peek under the sofa so she put her bread down and went into the parlor and peeked. The cat, underneath the sofa, was dead, and its claws were caught on the underside of the thing, like enshadowed beams supporting a decayed ceiling. She washed her hands after

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feeling the stiffening in the cat's right forepaw; and took the rest of her toast before telephoning to the mayor of Fourques, who said he would be over immediately to assist in whatever way he could and cleared his throat, then, twice.

The mayor of Fourques, who went by the name of Ruit, arrived shortly with a brown paper bag covered with red berry stains. Patrice was ready with a towel in her hand. "We won't need that," Ruit told her. Soon he unhooked the cat from the bottom of the sofa and slid her into the bag. He picked the bag up then with a long arm, as though it felt pliably heavy. Patrice and Ruit found Mme. de Rocattefours in her studio, smoking, working on an oil. "Aunt," Patrice said to her, "the cat is dead." Mme. de Rocattefours nodded and went on with her oil, saying, "Can you take care of it?" Patrice felt that her fingers were cold. She heard Ruit saying something and then felt herself being guided from the room. She could not lose the sight of him sliding the cat into the bag, the jostling of the bag and the stains from the—what?—strawberries, and the smooth, almost instrumental surface of the hardwood floor. The body of the cat had made a swishing sound, and there had been the rumpling of the top of the bag, then. "Thanks, Ruit," Mme. de Rocattefours said to the mayor of Fourques, looking up from her work for a moment, there being a concentration involved in maintaining the balance of the cigarette and the paintbrush in one hand together.

Patrice and Ruit marched along a dirt road. "You were not here last year when Wilhelmina died," Ruit told her in a laborious voice, "but I went with your aunt to the veterinarian, Kupel, who had three other people waiting in his office. The moment he saw her he said, 'Would you excuse this lady for a moment please—she's had a tragedy in the family.' Can you imagine, a tragedy in the family! He's a sentimental one. We had to put her in the freezer because at that time all the gravediggers were on strike here, can you imagine? 'Lucky it's not you who's died,' I said to your aunt, and we had a very good laugh. It was a monumental freezer at Kupel's, full, all full. We had a rich old laugh, your aunt and I. She's a

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heroine, that lady." Patrice noticed that he kicked pebbles as he walked and preened his white moustache every couple of steps. He was letting the bag with the cat swing naturally as they came nearer and nearer the banks of the Little Rhône.

Some comments were exchanged about the cat and about Mme. de Rocattefours at the side of the little hole he had dug. "Cats die on her," was one of Ruit's comments. He put gray earth on top of the body, building it to a lumpy mound; and they patted the mound good and soundly until they had levelled it. "In my grandfather's time they used to dance upon a grave but this one is too small," he told her. The sun was behind a cloud now; then flagrant and hollow in the chilly sky. She did not know what she should say to him, and he saw this so he added, "My grandfather was a boisterous fellow. Everyone always called him the life of the party." His eyes, swollen, seemed to inspect her. She concentrated on folding up the paper bag. A duck came into view upon the river (the iridescent green pulsing on its neck), swam in an arc and disappeared again.

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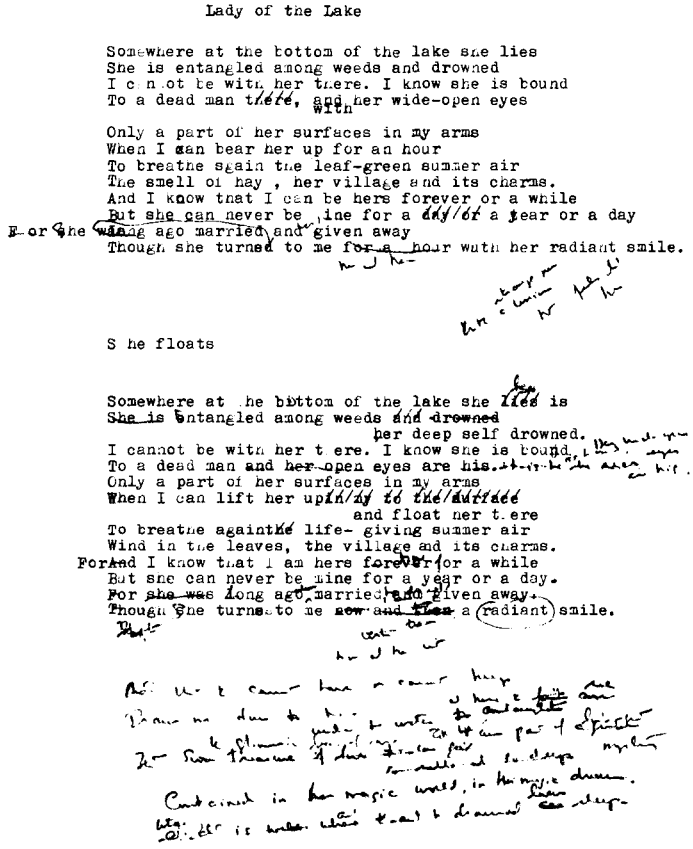

Lady of the Lake

Somewhere at the bottom of the lake she lies
She is entangled among weeds and drowned
I c n ot be with her there. I know she is bound
To a dead man there, and her wide-open eyes

Only a part of her surfaces in my arms
When I can bear her up for an hour
To breathe again the leaf-green summer air
The smell of hay, her village and its charms.
And I know that I can be hers forever or a while
But she can never be mine for a day or a year or a day
For she was long ago married and given away
Though she turned to me for a hour with her radiant smile.

S he floats

Somewhere at the bottom of the lake she lies is
She is entangled among weeds and drowned
her deep self drowned.
I cannot be with her t ere. I know she is bound,
To a dead man and her open eyes are his.
Only a part of her surfaces in my arms
When I can lift her up/ to the/surface
and float her t.ere
To breathe againthe life- giving summer air
Wind in the leaves, the village and its charms.
For And I know that I am here forever for a while
But she can never be mine for a year or a day.
For she was long ago married and given away.
Though she turns to me now and then a (radiant) smile.

A manuscript page from May Sarton's latest book of poems, Halfway to Silence.

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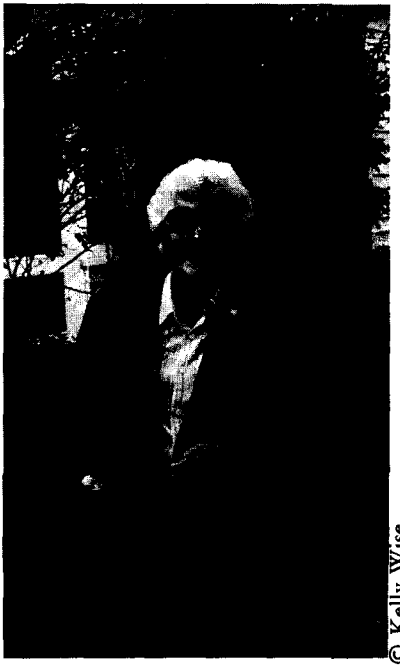

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The Art of Poetry XXXII
May Sarton

The author of a remarkably varied body of work (nearly forty books), May Sarton lives by herself in York, Maine, in a former "summer cottage," quite isolated, at the end of a long dirt road. The road curves through a well-kept wood ending at "The House by the Sea" *(the title of one of her journals). The house, formal in design, is of pale yellow clapboard fronted by a flagstone terrace. It faces, across a rolling meadow, the deep blue of the ocean marked here and there by a line of white foam. It is a late November afternoon and growing cold. The flower beds around the house, running along the fence and at the edge of the terraces, are all banked*

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for winter. Her little Sheltie, Tamas, alerts her to the arrival of a guest, and she comes to greet me at the gate.

Possessed of that profound attentiveness characteristic of true charm, May Sarton has, at the same time, an exuberant nature. Her voice, full of inflection and humor, expresses the range of her personality. It is a beautiful voice, trained from her days as a young actress with Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre, but also a voice with an "old world" echo in it; her father was Belgian and her mother, an artist, English. It has been called a "burnished" voice and it makes for spellbinding poetry readings, which she gives frequently —from small New England churches to the Library of Congress, and at colleges everywhere.

In the library, a fire is blazing, and Bramble, the once wild cat, is asleep on the couch. Ms. Sarton brings in a tea tray, complete with cinnamon toast and cookies. In this room, with the shelves of her work—novels, books of poems, memoirs and journals—and the shelves of her father's works (George Sarton was the noted Harvard historian of science), under the benign gaze of Duvet de la Tour, "The Ancestor" ("always referred to as if he were the only one"), the interview begins.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say a word about your work as a whole?

SARTON

My first book was a book of poems, *Encounter in April*, followed by my first novel, *The Single Hound*. There was quite an interval before the second novel, *The Bridge of Years*. And then *Shadow of a Man*. Then it goes on and on for a long time with a book of poems between every novel. That was my wish, that the poems should be equal in number, that the novels should not be more important than the poems because the poems were what I cared about most. Much later, when I was forty-five or so, I began to do nonfiction—first the memoirs and finally the journals which came as the last of the forms which I have been using. Al-

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together now I think it amounts to seventeen novels, I don't know, five or six memoirs and journals, and then twelve books of poems which are mostly in the collected poems now.

INTERVIEWER

Has it been easy to shift amongst all these different forms?

SARTON

Sometimes the demon of self-doubt comes to tell me that I've been fatally divided between two crafts, that of the novel and that of poetry, but I've always believed that in the end it was the total work which would communicate a vision of life and it really needs different modes to do that. The novels have been written in order to find something out about what I was thinking, questions I was asking myself that I needed to answer. Take a very simple example, *A Shower of Summer Days*. The great house that dominates the novel was Bowen's Court. What interested me was the collision between a rich nature, a young girl in revolt against everything at home in America, and ceremony, tradition and beauty as represented by the house in Ireland.

INTERVIEWER

Is it safe to assume that the rebellious young woman is based partly on you?

SARTON

Not at all. It's a complete invention. The only person who is not invented in that book is the husband of Violet, and he is based on Elizabeth Bowen's husband. The house is, as I said, Bowen's Court. I stayed there.

INTERVIEWER

And you knew Elizabeth Bowen.

SARTON

Oh, yes. I was in love with her. I've said what I really want to say about her in the portrait [*A World of Light*]. She was

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a marvelous friend. A very warm and giving person.

INTERVIEWER

What intrigues me in your portrait of her is that although she had a tremendous effect on you emotionally, she had no influence on you artistically. You never emulated her work.

SARTON

No. Very little influence. None. Her style is too mannered. At her best, in *The Death of the Heart*, it's marvelous, but in the later books her style became too literary in a not very attractive way to me. For instance, a sentence is very rarely a straight sentence.

INTERVIEWER

It's convoluted?

SARTON

It's convoluted and put upside down. "Very strange was the house" instead of "The house was very strange." Incidentally, Elizabeth Bowen appears in my novel *A Single Hound*, as the lover of Mark. I made her into a painter.

INTERVIEWER

We were talking, before this digression, about why you write novels. You say you write them to find out what you are thinking, to answer a question. Could you give another example?

SARTON

In the case of *Faithful Are the Wounds*, the question was: how can a man be wrong and right at the same time? This book was based on the suicide of F.O. Matthiessen during the McCarthy era. At that time, people outside his intimate circle, and I was never an intimate of Mattie's, did not know that he was a homosexual, so that is only suggested in the novel. But what interested me was that Mattie believed that socialists and communists could work together in Czecho-

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slovakia and had gone way out on a limb to say this was possible and was going to happen and might be the answer to world peace. Then the communists took over and the socialists were done in. It was a terrible blow to Mattie and some people thought the suicide came from that. I wrote the novel partly because I was very angry at the way people I knew at Harvard reacted after his suicide. At first, as always happens with a suicide, people close to him thought, "What could we have done?" There was guilt. Then very soon I heard, "Poor Mattie, he couldn't take it." That was what enraged me, because these people didn't care that much, were not involved. And Mattie did care. I'm sure the suicide was personal as well as political, and perhaps everything was all wound up together at that point . . . but he was right in the deepest sense, you see, only he had bet on the wrong horse. His belief that people could work together, and that the Left must join, not divide, was correct. It proved to be unrealistic. But he wasn't nearly as wrong as the people who didn't care. That's what I wrote the novel out of.

INTERVIEWER

You've spoken of the novel. Earlier, you spoke of the body of your work as a whole. Would you talk about how the different parts fit together?

SARTON

The thing about poetry—*one* of the things about poetry—is that in general one does not follow growth and change through a poem. The poem is an essence. It captures perhaps a moment of violent change but it captures a moment, whereas the novel concerns itself with growth and change. As for the journals, you actually see the writer living out a life, which you don't in any of the other forms, not even the memoirs. In memoirs you are looking back. The memoir is an essence, like poetry. The challenge of the journal is that it is written on the pulse, and I don't allow myself to go back and change things afterwards, except for style. I don't expand later on. It's whatever I am able to write on the day about

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whatever is happening to me on that day. In the case of a memoir like *Plant Dreaming Deep*, I'm getting at the essence of five years of living alone in a house in a tiny village in New Hampshire, trying to pin down for myself what those five years had meant, what they had done to me, how I had changed. And that's very different from the journals. I must say, I'm not as crazy about the journals as some of my readers are. I get quite irritated when people say the journals are the best thing. God knows, I've struggled with certain things in the journals, especially about being a woman and about being a lesbian. The militant lesbians want me to be a militant and I'm just not.

But as for the vision of life in the whole of my work, I would like to feel that my work is universal and human on the deepest level. I think of myself as a maker of bridges—between the heterosexual and the homosexual world, between the old and the young. *As We Are Now*, the novel about a nursing home, has been read, curiously enough, by far more young people than old people. It terrifies old people to read about other old people in nursing homes. But the young have been moved by it. Many young people write me to say that they now visit elderly relatives in these places. This is the kind of bridge I want to make. Also, the bridge between men and women in their marriages, which I've dealt with in quite a few of the novels, especially in the last one, *Anger*.

So what one hopes, or what I hope, is that the whole work will represent the landscape of a nature which is not primarily intellectual but rather a sensibility quite rich and diverse and large in its capacities to understand and communicate.

INTERVIEWER

How do you see your novels fitting into the tradition of the novel form?

SARTON

Well, they are quite traditional. I certainly haven't broken the forms. This is true in the poetry too. I think this may be

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one reason I have not had a great deal of critical attention, because the critics, I mean the real critics, not just the reviewers, are interested in the innovators. I suppose that *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing* is innovative in that the material had not been dealt with as openly before, or at least not quite in the same way. But the technique isn't extraordinarily radical.

I have done all kinds of things with points of view in my novels, but I prefer the omniscient view, which I used in *Kinds of Love*. I think it's better for me, and perhaps for a poet, because you are able to describe things. In a novel like *Crucial Conversations*, the point of view is that of a friend of the marriage, an observer, and there is so much you simply cannot describe. You can't describe the atmosphere, the landscape, the interior of a house, say, without being quite awkward in the way you do it. "He walked in and noticed the roses were faded on the little eighteenth-century table." It's a little self-conscious. Ever since Henry James, there has been this big quibble about the point of view. As I say, I prefer the omniscient view although it's very unfashionable and is constantly pounced upon by the critics.

And the dialogue, of course. Elizabeth Bowen has said the great thing about dialogue: "Dialogue is what people do to each other." *Anger* is a perfect example. The war between these two characters is a war of dialogue. To some extent also in *Crucial Conversations* and even in an old novel of mine, *Shadow of a Man*, which I dipped into the other day because people are reading it now that it's in paperback, a great deal happens in the dialogue.

INTERVIEWER

For which of the novels do you have the greatest affinity?

SARTON

Mrs. Stevens, I think, *Faithful Are the Wounds* and *As We Are Now* would be my three . . . and *A Reckoning*. Those four. Of course, they are all very different. *Faithful Are the Wounds* is a passionate political book, and I haven't done

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that any other time. In *As We Are Now* I think I did succeed in making the reader absolutely identify with Caro, the old woman who is stuffed into a ghastly rural nursing home and who is trying to stay alive emotionally. I look at *As We Are Now* as a descent into hell in which there are different steps down. The first is the person being captured, so to speak, and put in jail. The final step is when genuine love is made dirty. Caro had come alive again because a gentle nurse came into this terrible place and she sort of fell in love with her. Then that love is made dirty by the people who own the home. She tries to run away at that point. That's the final step; after that she begins to go mad and suffers despair. That's when she decides to burn the place down. She has a long conversation about God with her minister. One thing I like about this book is that there is a good minister in it. Ministers are almost always treated ironically in fiction, or made into monsters of some kind. This minister really listens. He isn't trying to tell her something. He's interested in what she has to say.

INTERVIEWER

So the end represents madness, not in any way a cleansing.

SARTON

Well, it's partly a cleansing action for her. The end has been questioned, and I myself question it because she burns up innocent people in the fire. But I felt it had to end that way. The innocent people were just vegetables, and so ill-treated that one felt death was better, really. And Caro probably does feel this way, only it isn't quite sane; she has all the inventiveness of the mad person who has an *idée fixe* of how she is going to proceed.

INTERVIEWER

At what point does the end become inevitable?

SARTON

When genuine love is defiled. That's when everything goes. There is nothing left. Then she is in hell.

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INTERVIEWER

And the reason for your particular affinity with the novel *A Reckoning*?

SARTON

The origin of the book is rather interesting. I wrote it before I myself had cancer, and a mastectomy. But at an earlier date I *thought* I had cancer, and for a few days while the biopsy was being done I had an immense feeling of relief that I could lay the burden of my life down, get rid of all the clutter, and for the last six months of it, simply live and look at the world . . . look at the sun rise and not do anything that I ought to do. And then when I heard that I was all right and had to pick up the burden again of answering letters and living my life, which is a very good one but very demanding, I cried. I went out to Raymond, the gardener, and said, "I'm all right, Raymond," and burst into tears.

That was the clue to the novel, you see. Then I thought, "Ah! I'm going to write it. What would it have been like if I had had cancer, and six months to live my own death?" Really, the book is about how to live as much as it is about how to die. From much that I hear about it, I know it has been a helpful book. It's used in the hospices, and in nursing homes, and often read by nurses and people who are dealing with the dying. It has been useful, there is no doubt, and that is a wonderful feeling.

INTERVIEWER

Have any particular novelists been mentors?

SARTON

Yes. Certainly Virginia Woolf. She was the novelist who meant the most to me when I was learning. But she is a dangerous mentor from the technical point of view because she can't be imitated. It's too much her own genius. My first novel is written in a very Woolfian way. There's a description of a woman walking down some steps and it's summer and it's like a pastiche of Woolf. I never did that again.

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INTERVIEWER

You've written in your journals about your meetings with Virginia Woolf but can you cast your mind back and describe the very first moment you met her?

SARTON

I had left my first book of poems at her door, with some flowers, and the darling maid opened the door just then and said, "Oh, won't you come up?" I said, "Oh, no, I wouldn't think of it." I just left the book. Elizabeth Bowen knew that I wanted to meet Virginia Woolf desperately, so she invited the two of us and a couple of other people to dinner. That was when I first met her. She walked in, in a "robe de style," a lovely, rather eighteenth-century looking, long dress with a wide collar, and she came into the room like a dazzled deer and walked right across—this was a beautiful house on Regent's Park—to the long windows and stood there looking out. My memory is that she was not even introduced at that point, that she just walked across, very shyly, and stood there looking absolutely beautiful. She was much more beautiful than any of the photographs show. And then she discovered that I was the person who had left the poems.

She was very canny . . . she answered my gift of that book with a lovely note, which is now in the Berg collection, just saying: "Thank you so much, and the flowers came just as someone had given me a vase, and were perfect, and I shall look forward to reading the poems." In other words, never put yourself in a position of having to judge. So she never said a word about the poems. But she was delighted to find out that I was the person who had left them.

Then, later, we talked—Elizabeth and Virginia Woolf and I. The gentlemen were having their brandy and cigars in the other room. We talked about hairdressers. It was all like something in *The Waves*! We all talked like characters in a Virginia Woolf novel. She had a great sense of humor. Very malicious. She liked to tease people, in a charming way, but she was a great tease.

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INTERVIEWER

Did you feel shy?

SARTON

Of course! But she put me at ease and I saw her quite often after that. Every time I was in England I would have tea with her, which was a two-hour talk. She would absolutely ply me with questions. That was the novelist. I always felt the novelist at work. Where did I buy my clothes? Whom was I seeing? Whom was I in love with? Everything. So it was enrapturing to a young woman to be that *interesting* to Virginia Woolf. But I think it was her way of living, in a sense. Vicariously. Through people.

INTERVIEWER

But you've written that you felt a certain coldness, in spite of . . .

SARTON

Yes. She was never warm. That's true. There was no warmth. It was partly physical, I think. She was a physically unwarm person. I can't imagine kissing her, for instance, I mean on the cheek. But she was delightful, and zany, full of humor and laughter. Never did you feel a person on the brink of madness. That has distorted the image, because she was so in control.

INTERVIEWER

You were speaking of influences. Whom else would you add?

SARTON

The person who influenced me the most has been François Mauriac. I greatly admired the economy and thrust of his books. He was able to create so much between the lines. I was aiming for that. I was aiming to eliminate what at first I was praised for, a so-called "poetic style." I wanted to get rid of that and to make the poetry less obvious, to make it sharper

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and purer and simpler. I've worked to get a more and more clarified style, but I think this has been misunderstood in my case. Somebody said of *As We Are Now*: "A ninth-grader could have written it"—meaning the style. I mean, this person simply didn't get it! Other people did get it, fortunately. Of course, the thing that is so tremendous with Mauriac, and isn't possible for me because I don't belong to the Church, is the Catholic in him which gives this extra dimension to everything that he wrote. I envy him that.

INTERVIEWER

How was it that you began to write the journals?

SARTON

I wrote the first one, *Journal of a Solitude*, as an exercise to handle a serious depression and it worked quite well. I did have publication in mind. It wasn't written just for me. I think it's part of the discipline. It keeps you on your toes stylistically and prevents too much self-pity, knowing that it's going to be read and that it will provide a certain standard for other people who are living isolated lives and who are depressed. If you just indulge in nothing but moaning, it wouldn't be a good journal for others to read. I also found that by keeping a journal I was looking at things in a new way because I would think, "That—good! That will be great in the journal." So it took me out of myself, out of the depression to some extent. This happened again with *Recovering*.

INTERVIEWER

You write for publication; do you have an imagined audience?

SARTON

It's really one imaginary person.

INTERVIEWER

Would you talk a little about this imaginary person?

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SARTON

Well, I don't mean that when I sit down I think, "Oh, there is that imaginary person over there I'm writing for," but . . . yes! Somebody who sees things the way I do, who will be able to read with heart and intelligence. I suppose somebody about my age. It used to be somebody about forty-five; now it's somebody about seventy. But then *Journal of a Solitude* brought me a whole new audience, a college-age audience. That was very exciting because until then my work had appealed mostly to older people.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't it true that lately you have been embraced by the spiritual establishment?

SARTON

Yes, this has happened only recently and has been extremely moving to me. I have come out as a lesbian. And although I have no shame about this at all, I still feel it's quite extraordinary that religious groups would be so receptive to me, as the Methodists were, for instance. They asked me to be one of the speakers at their yearly retreat for pastors. The other speakers were religious in a way that I am not. Then, the Unitarians gave me their Ministry to Women Award last year and I was touched by what they said . . . that I'd helped women by my honesty. The Methodists also talked about honesty.

I must say it was quite brave of me to come out as I did in *Mrs. Stevens*, in 1965. At that time it was "not done." When I spoke at colleges I would never have stated, "I'm a lesbian." But this all changed in the seventies. It's marvelous now that one can be honest and open. At the time *Mrs. Stevens* was published, it was sneered at in reviews and I lost a couple of jobs. They weren't terribly important jobs but I did lose them. Now I don't think that would happen. It might if you were a professor in a college, but coming as a visiting speaker you can be absolutely open. Women's Studies have helped me enormously, there's no doubt about

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it. This is one way my work is now getting through.

I know of no other writer who has had such a strange career as I've had. When I started writing, the first novels were received with ovations. In 1956, I was nominated for the National Book Award in two categories, fiction and poetry. But after my fifth novel, *Faithful are the Wounds*, the one that was nominated, this never happened again and I began to have bad reviews. I was no longer in fashion. I can't think of another writer who has had as hard a time with reviewers over a period of twenty years as I have but whose work has been so consistently read. It's word of mouth. It's people . . . every day I get letters saying things like: "I loved such and such a book and I'm buying five copies to give to people." That's how books get around. And then the public libraries. Without the public libraries, serious writers, unfashionable serious writers like me, really wouldn't have a chance. Again, I hear from people, "I was wandering around the library and saw the title *Plant Dreaming Deep*. It caught my attention . . . now I'm reading everything you've written." It's wonderful to have this happen at the age of seventy.

INTERVIEWER

Will you talk about the relationship between the poet and the Muse?

SARTON

Many of my poems are love poems. I'm only able to write poetry, for the most part, when I have a Muse, a woman who focuses the world for me. She may be a lover, may not. In one case it was a person I saw only once, at lunch in a room with a lot of other people, and I wrote a whole book of poems. Many of these poems have not been published. But this is the mystery. Something happens which touches the source of poetry and ignites it. Sometimes it is the result of a long love affair, as "The Divorce of Lovers" poems, the sonnet sequence. But not always. So who is the audience for my poetry? The audience is the loved one for me. But usually "the loved one" isn't really interested in the poems.

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INTERVIEWER

You, and Robert Graves with his White Goddess, are perhaps the only modern poets to be so strongly and personally inspired by the Muse as a mythological figure. A literal figure. Do your Muses, diverse as they must be, possess any one thing in common?

SARTON

Maybe so. The word that popped into my mind when you asked the question was: distance. Maybe there is something about the Distant Admired Person. I had a curious experience in Berkeley recently, where I stayed with a friend I went to school with, the Shady Hill School, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She had saved a book of poems that a group of us had written. We used to meet, four of us, and read our poems to each other and savagely criticize them. These poems were *passionate* love poems to our teacher, Anne Thorp, the person I'm now trying to write a novel about. I was absolutely floored by the intensity of these poems! We were completely inexperienced. In that generation there was no sex, I mean nothing like what goes on now. We were asexual because we just didn't know anything yet. But we *felt* so intensely. And I saw that I haven't changed that much. I'm not innocent in the way I was then, but my feelings have remained very much as they were.

INTERVIEWER

If Anne Thorp had possessed all those qualities you worshipped, but had been a man . . . could you have been writing those love poems to a man?

SARTON

Yes, it's possible. I just don't know. The three other people did not become homosexual. Only I among the four.

INTERVIEWER

You have spoken of poems as coming from the subconcious.

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SARTON

It's not the poem that comes from the subconscious so much as the image. Also the single line, *la ligne donnée*. If I'm truly inspired, the line comes in meter and sets the form. But what comes from the subconscious is only the beginning. Then you work with it.

In the case of metaphor, it has everything to teach you about what you have felt, experienced. I write in order to find out what has happened to me in the area of feeling, and the metaphor helps. A poem, when it is finished, is always a little ahead of where I am. "My poem shows me where I have to go." That's from Roethke. His line actually reads: "I learn by going where I have to go."

INTERVIEWER

So you write novels to find out what you think, and poems to find out what you feel?

SARTON

Yes, it works out that way. In the novel or the journal you get the journey. In a poem you get the arrival. The advantage of free verse, for instance in "Gestalt at Sixty," is that you do get the journey. Form is so absolute, as if it had always been there, as if there had been no struggle. The person who sees the lyric poem on the page doesn't realize there may have been sixty drafts to get it to the point where you cannot change a single word. It has been worked for. But something has been given, and that's the difference between the inspired poem and what Louise Bogan calls the imitation poem. In the inspired poem something is given. In the imitation poem you do it alone on will and intelligence. I mean, you say something like: "It might be a good idea to write a poem about a storm down here at the end of the field when the fountains of spray come up." And so you go ahead and do it. But the difference is simply immense, as far as the poet goes. He knows, or she knows, what is inspired and what is imitation.

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INTERVIEWER

Would the reader know?

SARTON

I think so.

INTERVIEWER

What about the advantages and disadvantages of form?

SARTON

Form is not fashionable these days. What's being thrown out, of course, is music, which reaches the reader through his senses. In meter, the whole force is in the beat and reaches the reader, or the listener, below the rational level. If you don't use meter, you are throwing away one of the biggest weapons to get at the reader's subconscious and move him. The advantage of form, far from being "formal" and sort of off-putting and intellectual, is that through form you reach the reader on this subliminal level. I love form. It makes you cut down. Many free verse poems seem to me too wordy. They sound prose-y, let's face it. When you read a poem in form, it's pared down, it's musical, and it haunts. Very few free verse poems are memorable. You don't learn them by heart unless they are very short. But a lyric poem is easy to remember.

INTERVIEWER

You have written poems in free verse.

SARTON

Oh, yes, a lot. I find it exhilarating.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know when you're finished?

SARTON

That's the problem. I can go on revising almost forever. But with form, at a certain point it's all there. Another prob-

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lem, or danger, with free verse, is that it depends almost entirely on the image, so you get people using what I call "hysterical images," images which are too powerful because you've got to hit the reader over the head with something big . . . like talking about love in terms of the Crucifixion. Or the Holocaust. A tremendously strong image to say something which doesn't deserve that intensity and only shocks the reader, but in a rather superficial way.

INTERVIEWER

What poets have had the most influence on you?

SARTON

H.D., when I was young. It was the age of Millay. Millay was the great . . . well, everybody adored her. And I did too. I loved those lyrics. But I was fascinated by H.D. because of the freshness she managed to get into free verse. Then the other women lyric poets: Elinor Wylie certainly influenced me, and later on Louise Bogan, who I think was probably the most distinguished pure lyric poet of our time. There you get that marvelous economy and music and depth and also the archetypal images. And then Valéry, whom I translated with Louise Bogan.

INTERVIEWER

Because your parents were European, and you yourself were born in Belgium, has that made a difference to you as a poet?

SARTON

I think an enormous difference. Because the things that touched me most, the literary things, were mostly in French, and later on, at fourteen, I came under the influence of Jean Dominique.[1]

INTERVIEWER

What about those very early years?

[1] *Nom de plume* of Marie Closset of the *Institut Belge de Culture Française.*

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SARTON

During the first two years of my life we lived in a small heaven of a house in Wondelgem, Belgium. Then we were driven out by the war and went to England. In 1916, when I was four, we settled for good in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Even so, every seven years, when my father had a sabbatical, we all went to Europe. It took me until I was forty-five to become an American at heart. It was in 1958, after my parents were both dead, that I bought a house in Nelson, a small village in New Hampshire, and settled in for fifteen years and made roots. I describe that in *Plant Dreaming Deep*. I planted the dreams then and became an American.

But for very long, all my youth, from nineteen on anyway, I went to Europe every year. Although we never had much money, my father gave me a hundred dollars a month allowance, and an extra three hundred dollars which at the time covered a boat round trip, tourist class. I either stayed with friends, or, in London, in one of those dreary one-room flats which cost £2 a week with an English breakfast thrown in. I felt European partly because—I still believe this—the emotional loam is deeper in Europe. People are less afraid of feeling. The lesbian part of me came into this because in the Bloomsbury society of the thirties there was no trouble about that. I didn't feel like a pariah. I didn't feel that I had to explain myself. And among my mother's generation there were passionate friendships between women that were probably not sexually played out, but it was common for women to be a little in love with each other. It was taken for granted. It wasn't a big issue.

One of the themes in all I have written is the fear of feeling. It comes into the last novel where Anna asks, "Must it go on from generation to generation this fear of feeling?" I want feelings to be expressed, to be open, to be natural, not to be looked on as strange. It's not weird, I mean, if you feel deeply. And, really, most Americans think it is. Sex is all right, but feeling is not. You can have five people in your bed and no one will worry much, but if you say, "I've fallen in love at seventy," people's hair is going to stand on end.

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They'll think, "The poor thing, there's something awfully wrong with her."

INTERVIEWER

Young people read *Halfway to Silence* and quote the poems . . . it goes so much against our cultural norms, the idea of a woman of sixty-five writing a passionate love poem to another woman.

SARTON

Yes, I know. And I have done it more than once. The poem "Old Lovers at the Ballet" is really about this: how is the sexuality different for an older couple, old lovers watching these magnificent bodies which they don't have and the grace which they no longer have? I suggest that what they do have is something else, an ability to communicate spiritually through sex. I believe that at its deepest, sex is a communication of souls through the body. That can go on forever.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever write poems in French?

SARTON

I wrote poems for Jean Dominique in French, but I didn't know the language well enough, the prosody, and so they have a certain charm but nothing more. I'd never publish them.

INTERVIEWER

So the European influence is in the emotional climate more than anything.

SARTON

Yes. But as I said, the seminal influences in my writing were French; Mauriac for the novels, Valéry for the poetry, and also Gide at a certain time, particularly in the journals.

INTERVIEWER

Would you talk about the poems you're writing now?

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SARTON

I'm writing new poems now called "Letters from Maine." It's a new form for me. I've written so many poems in sonnet form, or in other forms, and I wish I could find something a little freer which is not free verse. These are a sort of loose iambic pentameter. They don't rhyme, and they flow. It's impossible for me to tell whether they're any good. In six months I'll look back and say, "That was a bad idea, it didn't work," or I'll say, "These are really quite good." Then I can begin to revise.

The poems come from a new Muse. A very distant one whom I probably won't see very much of. But it's opened up that mysterious door again. It's amazing, so mysterious, so extremely hard to talk about. Why should it happen that among all the people, the great many women whom I see and am fond of, suddenly somebody I meet for half an hour opens the door into poetry? Something is released. The deepest source is reached. Some of my best poems have been written for occasions which did not materialize, if you will. "In Time Like Air" is an example. "In time like air is essence stated" is the final line. Here is an example of an image which haunts for years, an archetypal image, *salt*, which I got from the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard has written a whole series of books analyzing images. In one of them he talks about the image of salt, and says it is a Janus material because it dissolves in water, crystallizes in air. I put that in a notebook and carried it around for years. Then I met somebody who started poetry for me again. I realized that salt was the image I needed. A metaphysical poem about love. And time. Love and time. There's only that one poem.

INTERVIEWER

You've discussed the different forms, or modes, you use to express your vision of life: poetry, novels, journals, memoirs. Were you ever tempted to write short stories?

SARTON

I did at one time write a number of stories when I was living in Cambridge and making very little money. I sold some

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to the then slicks, a lot of which don't exist anymore, and also to places like *Redbook* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. There are about thirty stories. I broke some taboos. For instance, I wrote about a woman dying of cancer and you weren't supposed to do that—write about it, I mean. *Ladies' Home Journal* published that. But they were not wonderful and I wouldn't like to see them reprinted. They were just . . . well, I sold one little piece for $600 which to me was a fortune, so that sort of set me off. I thought—Well! This is great! I'll write lots! And I did write quite a few but I finally had to stop because when I sat at the typewriter dollar signs were floating around in my eyes. It was the money. I somehow couldn't handle it.

INTERVIEWER

Could you write stories now?

SARTON

The form doesn't appeal to me very much. The short story is too much like a lyric, so that side goes into poetry.

INTERVIEWER

You have spoken with great admiration of Yeats who changed his style and grew in poetic power even when he was an old man. Earlier, you mentioned the new form of your latest poems. Using that sort of comparison, how does it feel to be seventy?

SARTON

For the first time in my life I have a sense of achievement. I've written all these books and they're there! Nobody can take that from me. And the work is getting through at last. For so long I felt there were people who would like to read me but didn't know I existed. So I'm more relaxed inside now, less compulsive . . . somewhat less compulsive.

INTERVIEWER

You don't find that your past achievement acts as a brake on further achievement?

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SARTON

Not at all. I feel much more creative now that I'm not carrying around that load of bitterness and despair because I was getting so little critical attention and therefore the readers weren't finding my work. Now they are finding it.

INTERVIEWER

You once wrote that to be worthy of the task, the poet moves toward a purer innocence where "the wonderful is familiar and the familiar wonderful . . ."

SARTON

That's a quote from Coleridge, of course. Where did I say that? In *Writings on Writing*, maybe. One of the good things about old age is that one often feels like a child. There is a childlike innocence, often, that has nothing to do with the childishness of senility. The moments become precious.

Ideally, one would live as if one were going to die the next day. I mean, if you were going to die the next day it would be well worth sitting and watching the sun set, or rise. It might not be worth doing a huge laundry.

INTERVIEWER

Your aspirations for yourself when you were young were quite lofty . . .

SARTON

Where did you read that?

INTERVIEWER

You told me.

SARTON

What do you mean? Of course my ambitions were lofty. I knew that I was a poet. This, like mathematical or musical gifts, you know when you are very young. My first poems were published in *Poetry* magazine when I was seventeen—five sonnets which open the first book, *Encounter in April*.

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Of course, I did think for a long time that I was going to be in the theatre because I had fallen in love with *a* theatre, the Civic Repertory Theatre founded by Eva Le Gallienne in New York. She accepted me as an apprentice. I could have gone to Vassar, but I chose the theatre. It was a difficult decision for my parents to accept, but in the end they backed the whole precarious plan.

INTERVIEWER

If you could be the seventeen-year-old looking at the woman of seventy, what would you think?

SARTON

I think I would be proud of myself. I've done what I set out to do and without a great deal of help. I never took permanent jobs in the academic world, which most poets have to do, not that they want to, and this has cost me something because the critical acclaim comes from the academic world, which launches a poet. But yes, I think that if at seventeen I'd known there'd be twelve books of poems (at that time I never imagined novels at all), I would feel pretty good. I'd say, "You did what was in you to do."

But I don't sit here and think, "Oh, how wonderful you are, Sarton." I think, on the contrary, "Oh, how much there is still to do!"

INTERVIEWER

You often see other poets and writers at conferences. Are you stimulated by this mixing with your peers, so to speak?

SARTON

I don't like writers. I don't like seeing writers. I'm not good at it. It upsets me. It's been too hard a struggle. I'm very competitive, and that side comes out. I'm uncomfortable with writers. I love painters and sculptors.

In relation to writers, the people whom I did love to see were the people who I felt were way ahead of me, like Louise Bogan and Elizabeth Bowen and Virginia Woolf. People

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from whom I had everything to learn and where my position was that of a neophyte. *That* I enjoyed. I have one very good new friend, a poet, Bill Heyen. He's a marvelously good poet, I think. But I really like to see what I call "real people" —who are not writers!

INTERVIEWER

One theme I wanted to ask you about is the phoenix.

SARTON

The phoenix, yes. The mythical bird that is consumed by fire and rises again from its ashes. That was D.H. Lawrence's symbol. I've appropriated it. I think I have died and been reborn quite a few times. One renewal from the ashes, to stick to the symbol, is recorded in my latest journal, *Recovering*, which describes a combination of the end of a love affair, a mastectomy, and a third very hard blow: an attack on my novel, *A Reckoning*. I knew this novel was going to have value for people who were dying, and for their children and friends and so on, and it was more or less damned in the *New York Times* as a lesbian novel. This hurt. So I was getting over a lot of things. Again, as with *Journal of a Solitude*, I used the journal as a way of coming to terms with depression, and that journal is helping a lot of people. I get many letters about it.

INTERVIEWER

Have you been reborn recently?

SARTON

Yes. Yes, I have. I had gotten to a very sterile place because I was seeing so many people this summer and making so many public appearances, and yet at the center there was a kind of emptiness. I began to feel like a well that had gone dry. And then I did meet a woman who started the poems again, and has centered everything again for me. It's quite miraculous.

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INTERVIEWER

Would you talk about the theme of the creative woman as a monster?

SARTON

Ruth Pitter, the poet, said in a letter to me once, "We are all monsters," meaning women poets. *Le monstre sacré*. As I say in the poem "My Sisters, Oh My Sisters," I think that was to some extent true. It isn't now. Now it's possible for women to have much more complete lives, and that's what we're working towards, really.

But let me go back for a minute to the phoenix. You see, at twenty-six I had been in the theatre for six or seven years, first as an apprentice to Le Gallienne and then, when her theatre failed, I kept the apprentices together and founded something called the Apprentice Theatre. We did a season at the New School for Social Research in New York—rehearsal performances of Modern European plays in translation that had never been seen on Broadway. We got quite a lot of notice. It was a kind of first off-Broadway theatre. But then we had to go into production in order to be a theatre. I was offered a small theatre in Hartford and we did a season there which was not a great success. I was looking all the time for new American plays and didn't find one. Finally we opened in Boston the following year and failed immediately, having spent $5,000 that I had managed to raise. So at twenty-six I faced failure, the complete failure of my dream of making a studio theatre a little bit like the Moscow Art Theatre Studio. This was one of the times where the phoenix died and had to be reborn again and I was reborn as a writer. I was very ill after the theatre failed. I guess I had what used to be called a nervous breakdown. My mother announced, "May has to rest," and took over. I rested for three months, just lay out on a chaise longue. I was exhausted. Emptied out. But one has extraordinary powers of remaking oneself. I learned it physically with the mastectomy. I was amazed at the power of the body to come back after such a shock. For that reason, the mastectomy was a thrilling experience, odd as it sounds.

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The body has this power, and so does the mind and the soul, to remake itself. That is the phoenix.

INTERVIEWER

Given your experience in the theatre, might you not have been reborn as a playwright? Especially since you have such a strong sense of dialogue.

SARTON

I've written two full-length plays.

INTERVIEWER

Should I know that?

SARTON

No, you shouldn't. They were never produced, although Archibald MacLeish thought one of them had real possibilities and tried to get Robert Brustein at Yale to do it. The other one won a prize but I can't even remember what sort of contest it was. I wrote them quite fast, in about three weeks each, which is probably why they weren't better! But I wrote them long after the theatre failed. Ten years, at least. Maybe twenty years.

It was like a fever, the theatre, for me, but it was so closely connected with the Civic Repertory and Eva Le Gallienne and that marvelous theatre which was so pure. The theatre is heartbreak. I admire people who have the guts to take it.

INTERVIEWER

Apart from the informal teaching arrangements, you've earned your living entirely by your writing, isn't that true?

SARTON

Yes. I've never had a bonanza, but my books have been consistently read and now many of them are in paperback. It's been tough at times, but my writing has kept me afloat financially.

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INTERVIEWER

Everyone wants to know about a writer's work habits . . .

SARTON

I do all my work before eleven in the morning. That's why I get up so early. Around five.

INTERVIEWER

Have you pretty much stuck to the same kind of discipline over the years?

SARTON

Yes, I have. That I got from my father. I think the great thing he gave me was an example of what steady work, disciplined work, can finally produce. In not waiting for "the moment," you know, but saying: "I'm going to write every day for two or three hours." The trouble, for me, is the letters. They interrupt, and I give much too much energy to that. It's an insoluble problem.

INTERVIEWER

Would it be helpful, say, if you were stuck in your work, to switch over to the letters?

SARTON

I sometimes start the day with the letters. Just to get the oil into the machine.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have other ways of getting oil into the machine?

SARTON

Music. I play records, mostly eighteenth-century music. I find that the Romantics—Beethoven—don't work for me. I love them to listen to, but not to work with, alongside of, whereas Mozart, Bach, Albinoni . . . Haydn, I love. I feel the tremendous masculine joy of Haydn. That gets me going.

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INTERVIEWER

It gets you going, but do you keep it going?

SARTON

Yes. It's probably a terrible thing to do to the music but it does a lot for me.

INTERVIEWER

You have mentioned that you are writing a journal, and there are the new poems . . .

SARTON

And a novel. I'm hoping now to get back to a novel that went dead on me before I wrote *Anger*, called *The Magnificent Spinster*. I'm looking forward to doing it because it will be rather rich and poetic in a way that *Anger* was not. *Anger* was a novel like a blow, trying to get at things almost brutally.

This brings up an interesting point, I think. Here I have this novel, which I set aside for a long time and which I am going back to. In other words, you can plan for a novel. You can say, "I'm going to write a novel next year" and then go ahead and do it. Except that it might not work out, but still you can plan for it. You simply cannot do this with poems, they come out of a seizure of feeling. You can't plan for a seizure of feeling, and for this reason I put everything else aside when I'm inspired, because, as I've said, you can't summon a poem. You can try, but it won't be much good if it's written on command.

INTERVIEWER

You've written movingly about your parents in *A World of Light*.

SARTON

That is a memoir recapturing twelve different people, a celebration of great friendships. All of the people were dead, or "gone into the world of light"—the Henry Vaughan

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quote—at the time I wrote it, except one. I included my parents because their friendship has weighed on me all my life. Their influence was the most difficult to deal with, and the most inspiring. I've spoken about the value of memoirs as the past considered, as essences. In "The Fervent Years," the chapters in *I Knew A Phoenix*, I talk about my parents' youth. It taught me an awful lot about them, and about a whole period. They were tremendously idealistic people. They had the nineteenth-century vision of life, the perfectability of man. Ever since the Holocaust, something has happened to people, to all of us. We've had to face certain things which make it impossible for us to foresee a much better future. We're faced with a whole lot of choices that are pretty depressing. Whereas my parents still had that well of idealism and faith in humanity which runs through all of my father's work.

INTERVIEWER

What about your phrase, "usable truth . . ."?

SARTON

This is the function of poetry. To make people experience. That's where it's completely different from philosophy, where you think something out but don't have to experience it in your whole being so that you are changed. It's perfectly stated by Rilke in the sonnet "To the Archaic Torso of Apollo." One must visualize this ideally beautiful sculpture with no head and no eyes. The poem ends, "Here there is nothing that does not see you. You must change your life." That is what art is all about.

—Karen Saum

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Two Poems by May Sarton

A Farewell

For a while I shall still be leaving,
Looking back at you as you slip away
Into the magic islands of the mind.
But for a while now all alive, believing
That in a single poignant hour
We did say all that we could ever say
In a great flowing out of radiant power.
It was like seeing and then going blind.

After a while we shall be cut in two
Between real islands where you live
And a far shore where I'll no longer keep
The haunting image of your eyes, and you,
As pupils widen, widen to deep black
And I able neither to love or grieve
Between fulfillment and heartbreak.
The time will come when I can go to sleep.

But for a while still, centered at last,
Contemplate a brief amazing union,
Then watch you leave and then let you go.
I must not go back to the murderous past
Nor force a passage through to some safe landing,
But float upon this moment of communion
Entranced, astonished by pure understanding—
Passionate love dissolved like summer snow.

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Letters from Maine

1

Yes, I am home again, and alone.
Today wrote letters, then took my dog
Out through the sad November woods.
The leaves have fallen while I was away,
The ground is golden, while above
The maples are stripped of all color.
The ornamental cherries, red when I left,
Have paled now to translucent yellow.

Yes, I am home again but home has changed.
And I within this cultivated space
That I have made my own, feel at a loss,
Disoriented. All the safe doors
Have come unlocked and too much light
Has flooded every room. Where can I go?
Not toward you three thousand miles away
Lost in your own rich life, given me
For an hour.
Read between the lines.
Then meet me in the silence if you can,
The long silence of winter when I shall
Make poems out of nothing, out of loss,
And at times hear your healing laughter.

2

November opens the sky. I look out
On an immense perimeter of ocean, blue
On every side, through the great oak
That screens it off all summer, see surf
Edging the rocks white on the other side.
The November muse who is with me now
Gives me wisdom and laughter, also clarity.
Aware of old age for the first time, accept

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That I am old, and this sudden passion must be
A single sharp cry, torn out of me, as when
A few days ago on the ferry to Vancouver
I saw an eagle fly down in a great arc,
His fierce head flashing white among the gulls.
The ardor of seventy years seizes the moment
And must be held free, outside time,
Must learn to bear with the cleared space,
The futureless flame, and use it well,
Must rejoice in the still, quiet air
And this ineluctable solitude.

3

No letter from the muse. Time out.
Nevertheless I am floated on her presence,
Her strong reality, swung out above
Everything else that happens. In the mail
News of two brutal murders, and a wedding,
News of a poet friend in deep depression,
News from strangers reading my poems
And comforted, they say. I am suspended,
Wake before dawn to watch the sun come
Up from leaden waters every morning,
Turning the whole sky orange as it rises.
Slowly I learn the self who is emerging
As though newborn after a sterile summer.
Alone? Perhaps. But filled to the brim
With all that comes and goes, rejoicing.

Now there is someone to hold the kite
As it is tossed by the wind, keep it floating.
I manage better than I have for months to be
Open and balanced. The muse is there
To let the kite fly as high as it can,
Then slowly draw it in when there is peril.
So many times this summer it was broken,
Caught up in a tree or unable to fly.
The kite, marvelous muse, is in your hands.

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4

There was your voice, astonishment,
Falling into the silence suddenly
As though there were no continent
Between its warmth and me at my desk,
Bringing joy to the roots, a giant gift
Across time. Five in the morning there.
Three thousand miles to cover instantly.
How is it done? How for that matter
Did it all happen when we met?
Time telescoped, years cast away,
And primal being finding this present
Where we were lifted beyond age,
Outside responsibilities, newfound,
In a way stranded, in a way home at last?
And in your tender laughter at me
Some total acceptance of all that I am,
Of all that is to be or not ever to be
As time goes on and we are lost
Or found in it over and over again.

5

From a distance the ocean looks calm,
Gray and unbroken stretching out to Spain,
But it is seamed with hidden tumult.
The long swells come in slowly from below
And build to immense fluid walls
Driven in by some deep pulse far away,
Ominous while they stand suspended
Then at the rock edge tumble, broken,
And send up shattered towers of white foam.
Muse, do you feel the tumult over there?
Or is it only steadfastness of mountains
Today that holds you still and silent?
While I, like one of the black ducks
Bobbing out there, must keep my balance,

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Stay clear of the rocks as they do
Who know how to ride this tumult safely
And play its perils like a game.

6

"When a woman feels alone, when the room
Is full of daemons," the Nootka tribe
Tells us, "The Old Woman will be there."
She has come to me over three thousand miles
And what does she have to tell me, troubled
"By phantoms in the night"? Is she really here?
What is the saving word from so deep in the past,
From as deep as the ancient root of the redwood,
From as deep as the primal bed of the ocean,
From as deep as a woman's heart sprung open
Again through a hard birth or a hard death?
Here under the shock of love, I am open
To you, Primal Spirit, one with rock and wave,
One with the survivors of flood and fire,
Who have rebuilt their homes a million times,
Who have lost their children and borne them again.
The words I hear are *strength*, *laughter*, *endurance*.
Old Woman I meet you deep inside myself.
There in the rootbed of fertility,
World without end, as the legend tells it.
Under the words you are my silence.

7

Who has spoken of the unicorn in old age?
She who was hunted for her strangeness,
Androgynous, fleeing her pursuers, hopeful
When she was young that she could bow her horn
Before the perfect innocence and purity
Of a virgin being. Who has wondered
Whether she did find shelter at last?
Or does she wander still, searching human faces

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For the one who might speak to her
In her own language, look into her eyes
And gentle the wildness once and for all?
It may be that through that fervent pursuit
The unicorn has come to look for wisdom
And experience rather than innocence,
That she looks for a woman who has suffered
And become like gold, the dross beaten out,
As round and whole as a wedding ring,
A woman who has laughed and wept her way
Through the dark wood and across the lake,
Who has borne children, and who is now
Marvelously open, transparent, and unafraid.
Who has imagined the unicorn grown old?

8

When I heard you say in a brisk voice
"Perhaps we should never meet again",
The sun turned black, the tide froze,
I could feel the blood withering in my veins,
A breakdown of cells, death in my body.
It took an instant, three thousand miles,
And your voice alive in the room, to do it.
And now after days muffled in distress,
I must try to speak words when the reality
Is an immense silence, and nothing can be said.

Perhaps it is, after all, delusion and madness,
The poet forcing her muse to pay attention,
Forcing too much out of an hour of bliss,
Unable "to take love lightly as the grass
Grows on the weirs", trying to hold back the tide
From ebbing into the deeps. Not possible.

Nevertheless is my answer to your *never*.
Whatever the reasons they are only reason.
And here in the universe of souls
Reason is not the master of the moment,
Was not when we met and stared into each other's eyes

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Like sleepers woken suddenly out of a dream,
Suffering a blaze of light. Was that madness?
Was it delusion? No, a gift from the goddess.
Nothing is possible. Nothing is real, you think.
Nevertheless...nevertheless...nevertheless...

9

The muse of course airs out the inner world,
Without her presence somewhere a cell
With no window, where the poet struggles,
Snake biting its tail, Narcissus
Drowned in his own image. The muse
Ripples the waters, opens doors,
Lets in sunlight, dazzles and delights.
She frees the poet from all obligations,
Guilt, doubt, to wander alone by the sea
Picking up shells, or contemplating mosses
In the woods, free to be herself, to sing,
Uncontaminated by duties, projected outward
Able to pay attention to the smallest stir
Of wind in the silence, to observe birds.

When the muse appears after long absence
Everything stops except the poem. It rises
In an unbroken wave and topples to silence.
There is no way to make it happen by will.
No muse appears when invoked, dire need
Will not rouse her pity.
She comes when she can,
She too, no doubt, rising from the sea
Like Aphrodite on her shell when it is time,
When the impersonal tide bears her to the shore
To play a difficult role she has not chosen,
To free a prisoner she has no reason to love.

What power is at work, then, what key
Opens the door into these mysteries?

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If I Don't Phone, I'll Call, or Something

Thomas Glynn

I had to sue my landlord to get out of my apartment and then sue him to get back in and get my stuff. Here's how it works. Every evening I go in with two uniformed patrolmen and check on my bags. I suspect my landlord would like to steal them. He is stealing them.

The reason he's stealing them is that he talks with Rhenquist.

I've been in that godawful place for years. They never fix anything. The toilet upstairs leaks into mine. I've got Polaroids I showed the judge. I explained that the flash didn't work and the camera was out of focus and there's a reason for that but I can't explain that now and that's what I told the judge. They've taken me off medication so I put in thirty-five miles a day.

They had a three-week party upstairs and I called the cops every weekend but they never came until the final weekend when someone got shot through the ear. It was quiet after that, though the blood did leak into my toilet.

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I talked to half of Rhenquist the other day, his housekeeper. He doesn't talk to anyone. He carries around a debugging device.

Sims is suspicious.

He worked the same outfit I did, the company that publishes that financial paper. He's a civil engineer, and they put him on the street seven years ago. They fired all of us. He broke his hip kicking a drunk and it took him a year to get back on his feet. Has a new job, company that does credit ratings, he won't tell me about it, he won't tell me about anything. He doesn't like me here, and I'll leave soon, after I talk to Rhenquist. Someday I'll tell you all about Sims.

I complained about Rhenquist years ago but he had degrees with M.D.s pasted all over them and they fell on their pants when they saw them. I was in jail during the war over a union thing, but I'll talk about that later. I'm leaving Sims. Did I tell you about the Geese?

After the apartment and before Sims I had a motel on Long Island pre-paid for two weeks, I think the money came from Rhenquist to keep me quiet, right next to a garbage dump which they renamed a bird sanctuary. Geese talk almost as much as I do. I went down and listened to them.

I told Rhenquist he was a fool and told him it was nothing personal which of course it was but he took it seriously which is just what he shouldn't have done which is why he did it. I was just returning from the wars, full of patriotism, idealism grew behind my ears, and I tried to explain that to him.

My old lady, whom you don't remember, she's my ward, has been mugged five times with scars on her neck and I bring her candy and the *New Left Review*. She carries a hatpin with a large pearl nobbin on one end which she sticks in teenagers' necks. I do her dentures for her. She worked for Rhenquist years ago but he fired her, left her with nothing, said she was too friendly with me. That was when I was married to Helen, a very bitter time, before she shot herself.

Even then Rhenquist could have intervened when the papers came out. It was all over the front page. The company was upset, I tried to explain the union problem, and the

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Party wanted me to keep the whole thing quiet which is why I married Helen in the first place knowing she was pregnant and not knowing who did it maybe even me. Rhenquist called me into his office. You remember, you were there. Weren't you going out with Betty at the time? Sweet little Pennsylvania Dutch girl. I could tell you some things about her—she spread it around. But I didn't have to be in that office. They had no legal authority to call me in. If we had been unionized by then, which I fought and I think you know the reasons for that, I would have been protected.

It was our black hole. We all got sucked into it. Even you. I know you say you had nothing to do with it, but you helped prepare the papers, even volunteering to type them. (How do I know that? I know, I know. Sweet Betty, what do you think she did when you went away for your two weeks of summer training? But don't let that prey on your mind.) Just doing your job, of course. Not that I hold it against you, or if I do, it can be, was, or will be worked out.

Rhenquist, you know, doesn't walk well. One of his patients, an ex-patient now, ha ha, shot him in the leg. Here's why. He spilled some chicken fat on fresh plaster and his cat licked it up and as a result the vet said the cat had plastic insides and it would take months of castor oil which the cat hated and he kept shitting out this resin in hard little balls all over the doctor's—why do I call him that?—office. He joked about it with this ex-patient, who was a cat lover.

Rhenquist has taken up target practice. That's why Sondheim left him. Rhenquist had been treating him for lip palsy, seven years. A thirty-oh-six, shoots it in the basement under tons of sound-deadener.

Rhenquist was under tons of booze and who wouldn't with what he's got growing in his brain but I was also under the booze but I junked the booze at the place that made me junk the pills. Now I only take one pill a day and you'd crap a green turd if you knew what that was for. I have tea before ten, fruit until six, and two protein meals a week after ten. Usually Chinatown, some big pork fest, with lots of rice and those little green slimy things they grow in the sewer.

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That union thing bothers me though I got out of jail with a pardon and I'm sure Rhenquist knew nothing about it. He didn't even know there were American workers. Did you know his goatee was fake? Bought it at Kresge's and dyed it blue. Smelled awful in the summer, had to smell it when he had me on the couch. I never told you how long he was treating me before I got the job. Then surprise! He showed up at the same company. Thought it would be old times, you know, Party psychiatrist, but no, he knew all about me, considered it his duty to protect the company. I asked him about his goatee.

A doctor's confidence. Served papers on him. His housekeeper said he's taken a trip to Tibet. Right after my apartment was sealed for evidence. How can he walk in Tibet? I'll tell you why I didn't pay for that damn viola. I need the damn thing for evidence. Tell the music store. I have all the receipts from the Feds and can send them. It's a delicate case, or would be if Sims hadn't complicated it. When they came to the door I told him what to say and he quickly forgot and told them his partial version of the truth. Damn engineers need an instruction manual for everything. Forget to pick their nose if it wasn't in a book. Anyway, that's how I got the subpoenas and that's how you got served with your subpoenas, so I'm finally getting around to that part of the story and I'll bet you thought I'd never.

Sims wants me out, and I just may get the process-server to come around to him. Simply a matter of caprice. I am not a malicious person, though I am functioning on a post-Kantian level after insulin shock therapy. Find that it works best in this state, which of course you or no one else knows about, and ten cups of tea a day deadens all emotions, which helps. Just takes a while for your penis to unshrivel, but don't worry, the little beggar will come out when he's called.

If you had a spare room...well, I won't even go into that. All I have is one bag, a radio, typewriter, and some personal stuff that doesn't concern you. I hope you're not still upset over Betty or what I did to you on your last job. It was a question of historical necessity, try to keep that in mind, and you

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and Betty were never meant for each other. Did I tell you what she did with Ted?

He's in Bellevue. He thinks she is sending his picture around to all the agencies warning them against him. He hasn't worked in a year. She says he beat her, cheated on her, none of which she really minded. But he thinks she got together with a group of Wall Street semi-conductor types and cheated him out of an encoding device and then sent his picture around to all the agencies so he couldn't get work. He's trying to get a copy of the paper they put out on him. It won't do him a rat's-ass bit of good.

I can call back the subpoenas. If you'd let me stay I'd be happy to. Of course it's just temporary. My staying, I mean. Rhenquist had me followed. Was that on your orders? Hope not. Not that it really matters. Ted had the goods on Rhenquist, caught him on tape compromising a company official, so that explains Ted's mess. And then Rhenquist and my landlord are very thick. Alway have been, which I never knew until *after* I moved in. I filed a brief in small claims court for my belongings which my landlord must return only he's skipped to Florida, which is where all landlords live, so I had to serve his lackey who I happened to know from the old picket-line days. That was in Ohio, when I joined the Party and in New Orleans where they picked me up.

Of course the money didn't count. Who was I married to then? Oh yes, Helen. She was a lawyer, worked for an insurance company, put me through philosophy and got pregnant and still was writing briefs for the Party. They never paid her. They never paid for anything, even the union printers which is why they had such a bad name, but that's not why she put the pistol to her head. I got over that quick enough. Why didn't you come to her funeral? She bled down there, couldn't fuck, couldn't consummate anything except putting a hole in her head.

Sims locks up his records. I can't find a damn thing. I told him I needed some papers for the case against Rhenquist but he takes out his teeth and mumbles something and I can't understand him. His name used to be Sindemheimer, a

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Norsk, but he changed it when he got to this country because he heard they made everyone from Norway work in the wheat fields in North Dakota. Got his engineering degree in drag, ha ha. I'd be willing to call back his subpoenas too, and I told him, but he mumbled something. If he'd just give me the key to his records. Soon as I get the records I'd unleash the marshals again. Ungrateful maybe, but I don't trust the subways with the poison gas.

Sims is hearing little these days. I told him to buy a hearing aid but he refuses. Says I don't speak loud enough. He can hear my radio at night though, and certainly my phone conversations. He hears everything I say. I'm going to ship him some more subpoenas. I hate his smug, I-have-a-job attitude. Don't you? Or do you have one? Funny, with your problem. Of course I'm not going to tell, at least not very quickly. I could drop by the end of this month and we could negotiate my arrival. I keep to myself, don't bother much, cigars I smoke by the open window.

Actually, I'm out most of the day looking for Rhenquist. All I need is his testimony. Have a great way of finding the right people. I play the middle-aged, befuddled, red-tape victim. All the black and Chicano guards go out of their way to help me and they're the ones that really run those damn places anyway.

Rhenquist was debarred, didn't I tell you that? A complaint from his patients. Me, not a patient now, but I wrote the letters. He slept with too many of them. Called it the new therapy. He was always big on any way he could find to stick his thing in a woman's hole. I talked to the patients, wrote the letters. For reasons of drama I asked them to sign their names to my letters. Rhenquist found out I had written the letters and put out some subpoenas on me. I countersubpoenaed. We traded subpoenas daily. I have my room lined with them.

Came back to my apartment and found they had changed all the phones and put in long distance phones. We had no dial phones and you'd pick it up and go through a switchboard. Landlord fixed the switchboard and bought stolen

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Jersey phones which I found out when I dialed a number scratched under the phone along with an initial. Conversation: "Hello, this is 8400." "Pardon me," this is me speaking, "but did you have some phones stolen..." and etcetera and soon the landlord told three different stories to the phone security people. He's in Florida, enjoying the sun and my subpoenas.

Everything boils down. I can fit it all in two bags, three at most. Fifty-six years.

Two wars, unions, several marriages, a son, degrees, careers—it all fits in two, maybe three suitcases. I don't need much. Rhenquist knew that. I thought you might find him. He had a breakdown last winter. Went to some medical resort in the Poconos. I got a job there, therapist in the steam room, and when he came in by himself, wrapped in a huge towel, dragging his bandaged leg with a crown of purple hair (he'd changed the color of his dye) and his pink and pearl-rimmed glasses, wasn't he surprised when I turned on the steam. He sweats with colors, bangs on the doors, the purple dye running down his face. I was hard of hearing, Hostess Twinkies stuck in my ears. Wouldn't let him out. He sued the place, the place would have sued me if they could ever find me.

But I haven't seen him recently. He knew Helen. Did I tell you that? She was his patient. That's how we met, or rather didn't. Rhenquist started his therapy with her, which of course screwed her up and I married her to straighten her out but no philanthropy because I don't believe in that but I think he was in the Party then and he had to be protected and I stepped forward being, as I said before, damp behind the ears and did my duty but he ruined Helen and I was there to catch the pieces and watch as they tried to sew them back again but the stitches never held and that's why the pistol to the head. She was all changed down there.

Van Lier shouted his mother's phone number into the toilet for a week before they came and took him away. He turned into a painter. Remember him? The Party philosopher, though I thought that was my role. He and I went

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through Chicago together, M.A. in phil. Worked for the Parks Department, lifted weights, the New School, wife danced, left him because he was trying to kill her, joined a plumbing commune (seems they have every damn kind of commune these days), this was upstate, and then off to India with a guru who wore orange socks. He lives on the Lower East Side and drives a cab. It's all over.

If they come and ask you where I was the first week in July of 1944, don't tell them about Dayton.

I was in Van Lier's cab. Don't know if he recognized me. Sims was with me. He jabbed Van Lier in the back with his cane, but Van Lier only turned around and snarled at us. He spit at Sims, suspecting a holdup. Sims over-tipped, even after he had taken us to the wrong address. Remember the trouble he'd gotten us into in Dayton? That must have been on his mind. Yours too. Why did you run away that day?

I taught at the New School for three months, mathematical philosophy, and then Rhenquist got me kicked out, though I didn't know him then. Van Lier remembers because it took them a year to get rid of him and I think you left soon after that. Or maybe you left of your own accord.

That's all over.

If you don't have a bed a small cot will do. I won't bother your wife or your fine suburban neighbors. How much land do you have now? I bet it must be acres and acres. Must be expensive up there. I can stay in the garage. I don't need much. You'll hardly know I'm coming or going. I leave my pint of milk on the window sill so I don't have to use your icebox. If you want to order me around, that's OK. I'm used to taking orders. They stole my glasses three times in the last place, so I have trouble seeing, but then there's not much I need to see.

Rhenquist didn't have to do what he did that day. He could have kept quiet, and I wanted to get him on disclosing confidence, but the company said they had hired him so he would disclose. The courts, as you know, agreed. Just good business practice.

His duty.

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Mine is to shoot myself. I usually miss. Would you like my two suitcases? Here's what you get. Two drip-dry shirts, three pair of Ban-lon socks, a Sony table AM-FM. There's more, but I can't remember at the moment. I'm growing a beard and will dye it to match Ho Chi Minh's.

Helen wasn't a very good lawyer. Otherwise she would have gotten me off. That's why she worked for an insurance company.

Blessed be the Popes. Flirted with Catholicism, but conversion never did appeal to me, a dyed-in-the-wool Protestant atheist. Oh yes, there are also several plaid shirts and two pair of Pro-Keds. That's the only thing I wear these days. So I can run from the muggers, who also wear them to mug the muggees.

The last talk with the judge was instructive, or would have been if I could have gotten the Hostess Twinkies out of my ears. I think he told me I was too impatient. I told him I didn't have much time left, we had to prepare the revolution. My brother invented a perpetual motion machine. It's on a bicycle. Your weight on the bicycle seat makes it work.

When my landlord comes back I'll serve him the papers. My typewriter, my pills, my stationery ("Counseling/Testing, Orthology and General Semantics For The Gifted, M–W–F 8 to 9 P.M., S–S 7 A.M. to 8 A.M.). Maybe it's all still there.

Sims is fed up with me. I can't blame him.

Do you mind?

I promise not to bleed on your lawn.

I promise not to take up much room.

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Staying

I ask you to stay.
Here in my head I ask.
You don't know I'm asking,
that it must be this way
or nothing: you knowing
without me saying.

I have been asked, before,
with urgency, and I wonder
if that is not why I left.
Yes, if someone holds onto me
I have to get away.
And if they do not want me,
very much, to stay,
they do not ask,
and in fact, leave me.
Yet, if they could
not want me so much
and still stay with me
I would not go
and we would be together,
well, indefinitely.

But this seems wrong,
you not asking
and me staying
and asking inside,
willing you, in vain,
to ask me.

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Jerome

The parking lot's almost full.
The cars are yellow and green and black.
Cement is gray. My car quit
three years ago. I junked it.

The cars push the sky up,
but it comes down again.
It comes back like a dog,
but it's light and you don't trip over it.

I've got this twitch in my eye
since I got hit.
It was blue like a car.
I mean it was a car and blue.
It broke both my legs.
They said I was lucky to be alive.
I tried to laugh but stopped.
I told them, hey, Lucky's really my name.

I got money now.
I sit here and watch people go to work.
Red means stop.
I've got red shoes on but the car was blue.
The parking lot is air
and cement that's hard and don't move,
but the cars are different colors.

Step Two

I'm trying to tell you something
important to me
and you walk out the door,
leaving me mid-sentence.

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But then you're dead,
can't go anywhere.
I've got you now,
got your dead ear.

And I have a dream,
a young man, a friend.
I'm trying to tell him about you
how you didn't listen how

then he's in the garden
me in mid-sentence
faces turned toward me I shout
I'll kill you
if you walk out.

Him

That left eye
finds ugly faces in the carpet.
This right eye establishes
grounds for consistency.
He's a burr I can't get rid of.
I'm not popular
because of him. He makes me rude
with his rudeness.
He condemns vegetarians.
I am one.
He's meat and won't budge.
Dreams won't have rigidity of form,
scenes change without warning
and that left face grins. He says
mean things in color.
I give him my fist of an ulcer.

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John R. Reed

Paestum

We are happy walking on the dead,
sea breezes milling with the herbs ground down
on the hard pestle of the earth

to make a medicine that eases the heart.
The long alleys where citizens dallied are empty now,
clean and silenced with straw

so that the ancient dust will not rise up.
Only sparrows chatter in the temple, making nests

as they did, no doubt, when priests chanted here
and lovers swooned under the oleander's musk.
In the amphitheatre today

only the gaudy lizards run through their routine
for us and for the idle clouds that have seen it
all before. Our adventure is

to unearth calm from the daily beauty past.
Once a diver knifed above the water

like an open blade. He is still here.
We see him held in the bright air,
his ocean more azure and deeper than our sky.

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I Want My Beard

I want my beard
To be as long as
A road,
As long as fifteen busses
Lined up side by side
To jump over.
How long? As long
As your arm,
Ten feet long.
I want it to be
A truck.
I want it to
Run over your eyes.
I want it so long
You can't resist.
I want it back with
Just a few rough places,
Veined with grey.
I want my beard
To carry your load, hoe
A field, tow
A barge.
Let my beard go
Home with you.

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Lawrence Raab

Listening to a Certain Song

tonight I was reminded of our house in England,
the little record player that always skipped.
Our dozen records seemed such a luxury, although
we had much more back home in Massachusetts.
I don't want to pretend that we were poor.
You read Virginia Woolf and Thomas Hardy.
We argued badly and often about whether
or not to have a child, and when you cried
I talked until you stopped, with nothing settled
and nothing proven except that so many words
might bring us back to the way I thought
our lives should be. Twice it snowed.
Birds nested in the thatched roof. A woman
we never saw again brought us a Christmas tree
with the roots still on it. When we show
the photographs of that house to friends
it's this we talk about—the deer in the woods,
the cow that got loose on the lawn. Remember
waiting once a week for the bus to market day?
Remember when the rented car broke down in Scotland?
How easily that year becomes this landscape
of favorite stories, revised out of habit until

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neither of us can tell whose correction
is the truth, or if it really matters.
Friends drove down from London, nervous
and unhappy, their marriage a wreck,
and worse to come. We gathered blackberries
from the hedgerows until the neighbors
must have thought we were starving
and brought us loaves of bread, unable
to make sense of Americans who didn't own a car.
But no one can ever understand why anyone
chooses to live where they're living.
I told the man who sold me rubber boots
that I liked the silence. "Ah yes!" he replied.
"But sometimes the silence can drive you mad."
And we laughed at his dramatic gesture because
the silence was wonderful and no one
either of us had known had ever
gone mad. We bought a chair that broke
and a lot of books we sent home in small, carefully
wrapped packages, and they all arrived.

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Mark DeFoe

Jan. 27, 1979

Today was mixed—some flurries, some sun.
Skied into woodcut snow scenes, then home,
discussed Flaubert with neighbor, the one
who admires the boldness of Emma.

I talked with Jeanne about her Dad,
how he is contrary, yet fine.
About the hurts we have traded, some grown
raw, rubbing against their giver. "Dilemma,"

I say. My tough guy routine makes her sad.
Too neat, she replies. Too arch, she tells me.
My wise wife. She takes the kids to the show,
and I am alone, facing the TV.

I ease myself into evening, snug,
blunting my heart on the network news.
Iranians whirl in the streets, slug
the air, each pounding a despot.

A plane is skyjacked over Winslow,
Rockefeller died in harness, near broke
farmers herd their John Deeres toward D.C.
I turn to the window. Exhaust smoke

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blooms from a passing car. This morning
from the hills I saw my town, plain, sane,
heard the tolling of the courthouse clock.
This night a deer stands in my ski tracks,

rigid at the baying wild dog pack.
The house creaks. I test the doors, the locks.
When it comes, it comes without warning.
Nearby a neighbor is beating his child.

Those city dogs close, prolong their game,
slashing crudely. The deer's eyes roll wild—
dogs hang from his throat, chew at his spine.
The child is screaming. The deer is falling

My life coils behind my chair. I face my TV,
a bourgeois man alone in my home
and I am afraid to turn around.

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Madeline DeFrees

The Book of Sediments

Beside my bed the lamplight glows: a glass base
filled with shells containing
news of ocean. Each shell encloses what the sea
says to the listener. Each whorl and coil
reflects the secrets there.

Echo and Narcissus.
He falls in love with the image: his vision
flowers. She pines away for the other: nothing
left but the voice. The sun-drowned
sepals in the old stereoscope we called
a stereopticon: two complementary views—right
eye and left—caught on film the brain
registers and light fuses to a third dimension.

We let those wave-lengths tell us what the world
means, a corollary of echo-
location: different densities sending bulletins
from underwater. Ship Harbor Inn: we slept
above the Sound—frogs and crickets
a fluttering circle on the ear's horizon. That
one long note, the foghorn
cutting in and out of sleep.

Waves know their
burden of heavy minerals by weight. Neatly,
they sort them out in ocean's bed of separate
deposits: gold from monazite, red
garnet from zircon. Disaster always in their
wake, waves stumble on

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sifting platinum from chromite, grain by grain.
Some, considering the ocean

prospect, have made
themselves minor profits. Others
have gone for broke. Isn't that Gruber, there
next to the breeches'
buoy? The 300-pound quarryman we left, too fat
to fit in, refusing to be tied? His mid-
section circled by two life-preservers,
he made it finally in a bo's'n's chair, the first
to pass dry-shod.

And now the ferry docks
briefly at Shaw Island: a brown-robed nun,
Franciscan in pill-box hat with veil attached,
runs down the gangplank in sandals.
Clank of heavy chains, and then the double
dissolve into Friday

Harbor and the Whale Museum
where we saw a brain three times our size.
Remember the days we took to let the sea settle?
Bald Hill and Dinner Island? Cape San Juan
and Sunset Point. I tried the public
telephone: a killer whale
was on the line, and everywhere we looked was
light and water.

—from "The Light Station on Tillamook Rock"

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Elizabeth Spires

Second Story

How strange to be sitting in this room,
to be noticing the windows—clearer than air—
how they let in everything, the leaves,
the bright-colored leaves, hanging like bits
of paper from the trees, and the thin woman
across the street sweeping her porch—
though she swept it yesterday and the day before
and will, most likely, sweep it tomorrow—
and how strange to be thinking of you, always
of you, as the room changes imperceptibly, easily
moving from moment to moment, like a lover
whose infidelities are purely imaginary,
imagined by *you*, just as you're sure
the house might betray you, accommodating shadows
in your absence, sure that the room only
pretends to be *your* room, light climbing the stairs—
like an intruder or friend who left a long time ago—
pausing, changing its mind, going back down again,
as if the door were open and it could
come back anytime. Strange after so much time
to feel the same feelings, only stronger,
as the dust settles thickly on the tables,
and the afternoon shadows, unsure of themselves,
shrink into corners or lie on the floor,
and no letters arrive and the phone doesn't ring,
and the woman sweeping her porch casts
a cold eye up at you—the face in the second story
window, the whorled face staring at the view—
goes into her house and shuts the door.

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Portfolio

Portraits of Writers

Don Bachardy

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E. M. Forster, 1961

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W. H. Auden, 1963

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James Baldwin, 1964

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Frank O'Hara, 1965

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Janet Flanner, 1966

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Gavin Lambert, 1967

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Paul Bowles, 1968

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Joan Didion, 1972

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James Purdy, 1974

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Lillian Hellman, 1974

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Stephen Spender, 1978

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Thom Gunn, 1981

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Christopher Isherwood, 1981

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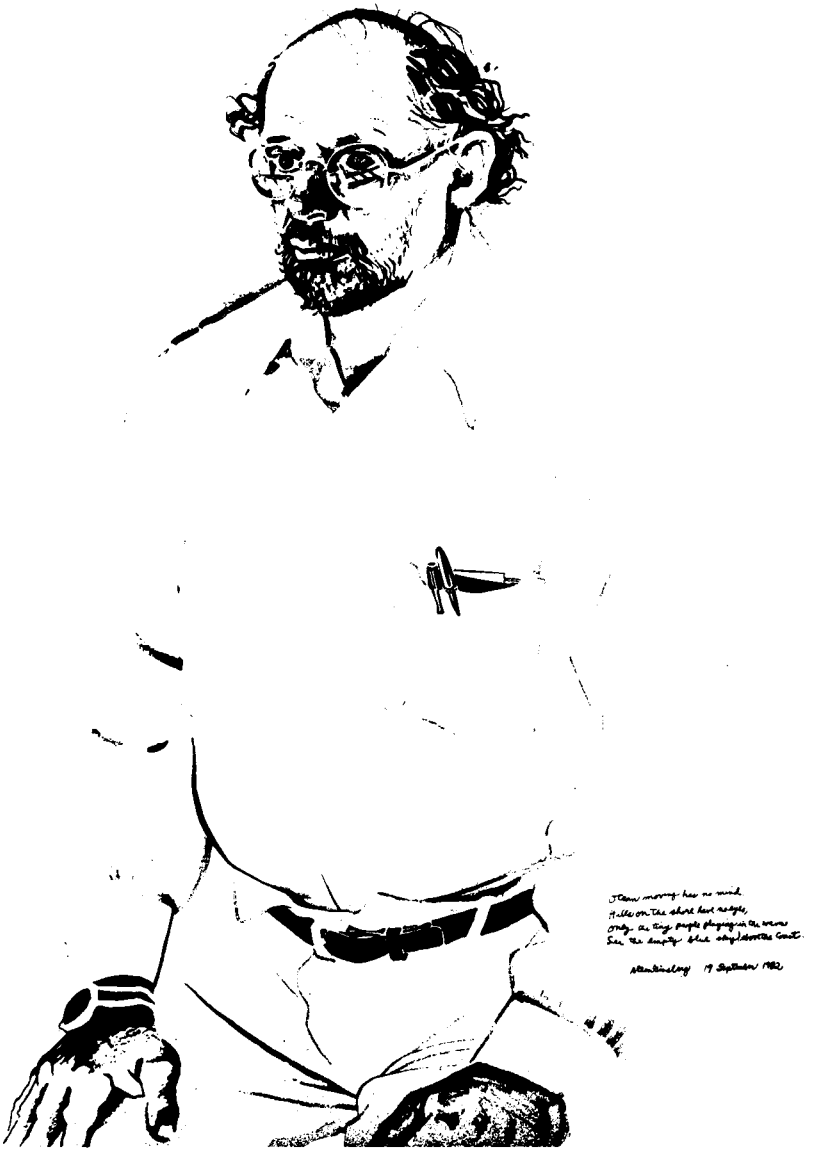
I saw morning hair in wind
Hills on the short last ridge,
Dog, as tiny people playing in the waves
See the empty blue sky between Coast
Stinsbridge 19 September 1982

Allen Ginsberg, 1982

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~~LINES FOR EZRA POUND~~

A COLLAGE FOR E.P.

At the Ezuversity

(Lead off with a tag from somebody like Socrates (Plato) or Cicero on the aims of education??) Epictetus, II, xiv is the text "And so now I am your teacher"

So I came to Rapallo, I was ~~19~~ eighteen then,
And you accepted me into your "Ezuversity,"
Where there was no tuition, the best beanery since ~~Bologna~~,
And the classes were held at meals in the dining room of what you
called the Albuggero Rapallo,
Where Gaudier's ~~big~~ head of you sat in the corner, an ~~astonishment~~
astonishment to the tourists,
Because it was too heavy to tote up to the fifth floor of Via Marsala
12/V
And might have ~~split~~ bust through the floor.
And you showed me with some relish that if ~~you~~ looked at the back of
the cranium it was quite clearly a scrotum.
Literature (pronounced literchoor), you said, is news that stays news, (checkO
Abd, quoting Harry Stottle (was he a buddy of Harry-Stop-Her-Knees?):
ut ~~poesis~~ doceat ut moveat ut delectet. (check it Was Harry)
Yes, you taught me and you moved me and you gave me great delight!
Your conversation was the wittiest show in town,
Whatever you'd ever heard or read was in your head as fresh as when
it came there first.
The books you loaned me were filled with caustic marginalia,
And I found where you'd gotten your City of Dioce in Herodotus, (why does EP drop the Gk s?)
And the world's greatest liar (better than Fordie) said that the
towers of Ectaban were plated with silver & gold,
But ~~and~~ you wrote:
"To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour
of stars."
(which is a far more elegant image)
And in de Maille's Histoire de la Chine (Paris, 1777) you'd put a
big star
Beside the part where he tells how Emperor had MAKE IT NEW (get his name)
painted on his bathtub.

A James Laughlin manuscript page.

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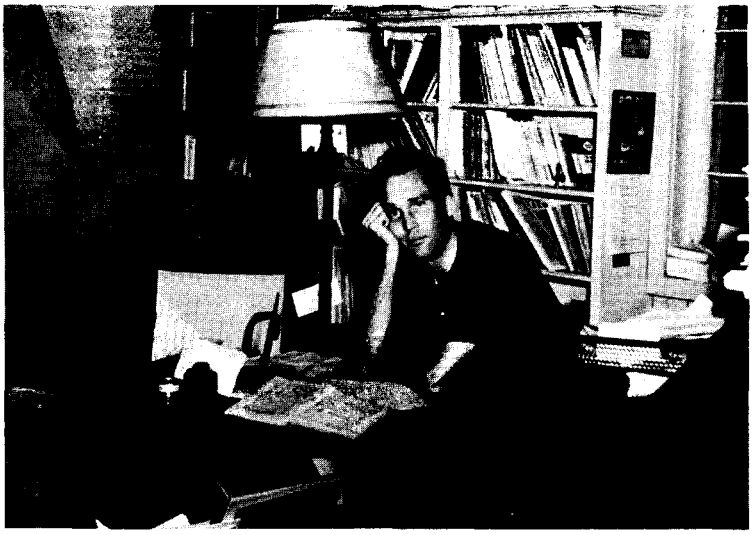

Polly Forbes-Johnson

James Laughlin in the old office in the stable at Norfolk, 1941.

The Art of Publishing I
James Laughlin

James Laughlin is a poet and the publisher of New Directions. His publishing house enjoys international recognition as one of the most outstanding of the twentieth century. Laughlin, though shy and withdrawn, can count many of the significant American writers of the past five decades as a friend or acquaintance. A frequent traveler since the thirties, he has always returned to the family home in rural Connecticut where he runs New Directions' affairs from Meadow House, a simple frame structure where often a small flock of sheep graze in the pasture. Just inside the door of the house, in the front hall, is a long table used to accumulate mail. Pre-

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cariously-balanced stacks are everywhere, with piles divided into manuscripts, letters, newspapers, and journals. There are six to eight stacks, each at least twelve inches high. Straight ahead is a large signed photograph of Ezra Pound; the mammoth, fan-shaped wicker chair in which he is seated seems to dwarf him.

Beyond the hall is the living room/study. The room is open and spacious, with three separate sitting areas, one of which functions as Laughlin's work place. The high ceiling, the wide picture window overlooking the meadow, and the French doors contribute to the sense of openness. The built-in bookcases are stuffed with books and records. There are Oriental rugs, but the furniture is modest, selected primarily for comfort and durability.

Laughlin's desk is covered with books, file folders, manuscripts, office supplies, memos, letters, an old typewriter, tobacco and numerous pipes.

Laughlin is tall—over 6' 5"—so that his size could easily intimidate others. It does not, though, because he is a soft-spoken, unassuming man who seems intent on avoiding the spotlight as much as possible. He takes pleasure in acknowledging that readers appreciate New Directions books and his poetry. At the same time, he is clearly uncomfortable with the celebrity status that has been thrust upon him by well-intentioned colleagues, grateful writers, and respectful academics.

The interview took place July 19–20, 1982, during a record-breaking heat wave. On the ground floor, the Laughlin home is air-conditioned only in the kitchen, so the discussions were intermittently placed in abeyance to permit Laughlin and the interviewer to drink iced tea, drive over to Tobey Pond for a swim, or escape to the comfort of the air-conditioned kitchen.

INTERVIEWER

You've mentioned numerous times that your family was not especially literary. What was life like at home that made

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you so passionately concerned with literature?

LAUGHLIN

I don't think there was really anything in the life at home in Pittsburgh which started me on a literary course. My family didn't read a great deal, except the Bible. Occasionally my mother did read very bad novels by Lloyd Douglas, but that was about the extent of her literary aspiration. She did paint—very pretty watercolors, mostly landscapes. Most of the pictures we had in the house were framed watercolors that she had done in various parts of the country or down in Mexico, where she went sometimes in the winter for vacation. I painted a little bit myself along with her. We'd go out together in the country and I'd dabble away, not very successfully. So there was a concept of painting as something which people did. And, of course, we traveled almost every summer in Europe, where we dutifully went to the museums to look at great paintings. But there was no compulsion toward art that I remember.

INTERVIEWER

In Europe did you ever encounter writers or literary people?

LAUGHLIN

The family knew no writers at all. I did pick up, when I was quite young, an interest in writing plays. I wrote a play every Christmas. I had seven first cousins living next door. Every Christmas I wrote a little blank verse melodrama which we would perform on the night before Christmas. These were very romantic, highly dramatic plays with a great deal of sword-fighting in them and fair ladies locked in towers and stuff of that kind. The problem was to get the cousins to learn their parts. They weren't very keen.

INTERVIEWER

Did your interest in writing poetry develop integrally from writing plays?

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LAUGHLIN

I don't think I began writing poetry until I was exposed to poetry in boarding school at Le Rosey in Switzerland. All of the classes were in French, of course, but one of the masters loved poetry.

He would have us learn fairly long passages of classical French poetry, things like Lamartine and Du Bellay and Prudhomme and Victor Hugo. We had to learn the poems by heart and then recite them. When I got back from Switzerland and went for a year to Eaglebrook School in Deerfield, Massachusetts, there was a remarkable old English teacher, a Mr. Gammons, who was steeped in English poetry of the past. He started me reading Wordsworth, Keats, and others. So that brought it along. We were very attached to one another.

Then, of course, at Choate, where they had a marvelous English faculty, I was thoroughly exposed to poetry, especially through Dudley Fitts and Carey Briggs. Briggs held all his classes in the library. His theory was to expose boys to books and let them dig out what interested them. He said on the first day of his class, "Gentlemen, here are the books. It's up to you what you get out of them." Each boy had to choose a project for the term. My project was poetic prose. I dug out everything on it in the library, beginning with writers such as John Lyly and Sir Thomas Browne, and going up through Rimbaud. Fitts was a very inspiring composition teacher; he got me writing prose. It was largely through him that I became editor of the Choate literary magazine. He was my introduction to modern poetry. He gave me Pound and Eliot to read.

INTERVIEWER

You have noted that even though you spent a good deal of time in the offices of the *Advocate*, you were something of a loner at Harvard. Yet you seem a very personable individual.

LAUGHLIN

I was socially retarded and not good at getting on with

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people. Harvard was very cliquish and socially conscious. Coming from Pittsburgh, I didn't rate with the boys who had been to Groton or Milton. Harvard was an aloof place then. In the dormitory where I lived (and I roomed with a very nice boy from Choate), we shared a shower with two boys from aristocratic families, Anthony Bliss and Peter Jay. But throughout the entire year we never exchanged a word with them, or they with us. It was the way things were at Harvard in those days. You sat in lecture halls always in the same seat next to the boy whose name was alphabetically next to yours. I remember that in History 1, I sat next to a boy from Boston. We never spoke. I'm sure it's not that way anymore.

INTERVIEWER

You have also indicated your debt to Harvard.

LAUGHLIN

You could get to the professors. I was close friends with Ted Spencer. I played tennis with him. I was friends with F. O. Matthiessen. And earlier on, I'd received much hospitality from E.K. Rand, the Latin scholar. He liked his students. He'd invite them out to his house on a Sunday; there might be four or five people sitting around and sipping tea and having a good time with the old boy. I think I was more aggressive than many students about making contacts. I wanted contact with my professors; I wanted to be close to them.

Of course, one of the greatest influences on my publishing work (after Ezra Pound and Kenneth Rexroth) has been Harry Levin—a man of enormous learning and taste, and in many literatures. You could always go around to Harry's and he'd give you a drink and you could talk to him and learn so much. Such wit. He's wonderful. He very kindly came to the poetry reading I gave up at Harvard in 1982 and we got to the little poem about the former director of the Metropolitan Museum, Mr. Rorimer. It's called "*Ars Gratia Artis*." After I read the poem I called over to Harry: "Harry, is that a tag from Horace?" He said, "No. It's from MGM." He told me

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afterwards how MGM had gotten their motto from some bird in France. I'd always thought it was Horace, and it isn't Horace. Harry knows everything.

One astonishing thing about Harry was that when, at New Directions, we were reissuing W.C. Williams's novel, *A Voyage to Pagany* (that's the one about Williams's trip abroad), we wanted an introduction. I thought it was a very long shot, but I asked Harry if he would be interested in writing it. To my happy surprise—he writes so gracefully—he said he would.

The first thing New Directions did with Harry was his *James Joyce*, which to my mind is still the best book about Joyce. Recently we did his beautiful book, *Memories of the Moderns*, which is one fine essay after another. But I had never seen anything he had written on Williams. Yet very quickly he turned out one of the best, most comprehensive, most perceptive essays that has ever been written on Williams. Harry had the scholarly capacity to "get up" Williams in a couple of months—although I was only going to pay him maybe $200 for the piece. But he cared enough and he wanted to know about Williams, so he found out.

INTERVIEWER

You have also reported Harvard as rather dull.

LAUGHLIN

Well, that was just after I got there, which was in 1933. I took a leave of absence and went to Europe halfway through my sophomore year. It happened to be a period of transition just then. The great men, the old fellows like Kittredge, Lowes and the rest of them had retired, and the new young lions, F.O. Matthiessen and Ted Spencer hadn't come on yet. The resident poet was Robert Hillyer who'd send you out of the classroom if you mentioned Pound or Eliot. So it *was* dull, and it seemed a good time to get away. I went to Europe to try to write, both stories and poems, and to travel.

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INTERVIEWER

That was the summer you met Gertrude Stein.

LAUGHLIN

I met her through a distinguished French professor with a limp, Bernard Faÿ, whom I met that summer at the Salzburg music festival. I used to go swimming every day in the public swimming pool and that's where I met him. It turned out that one of his best friends was Gertrude Stein. I told him that I had been reading Stein back in the U.S. and that she sounded fascinating. He wrote her that he'd met this young American in Salzburg who might be useful to her. He asked if he could bring me to Bilignin, in Savoie, which was her country place. I went and stayed about a month. It was a lovely place, what they call a *château ferme*—not quite a chateau but more impressive than a farm—with a view down over the rolling hills. She put me to work. She was quite a utilitarian!

INTERVIEWER

What did she have you do?

LAUGHLIN

Well, the next year she was going on her famous lecture tour through America, and somebody had suggested that in each city where she was scheduled she should hand out a press release explaining what she was going to be talking about. That was my job—to take these lectures and produce a one-page presentation for each. It was not easy at all. The *Lectures in America* are philosophical and dense. To try to identify their central themes and translate them from Steinese into American newspaperese was quite a task. I would try, carrying my attempts to her, and she would say, "No, no, you've missed the entire point. Go back and try again." That's why I stayed there a month. It took me that long to get these releases done to her satisfaction. The two of us sat out on the terrace in the mornings, working. Then in the afternoon we'd tour the countryside in her little Ford with

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Gertrude, who drove, sitting in the front seat with Alice B. Toklas, while I sat in the back with those two awful dogs—Basket, who was a white poodle, and Pepe, who was a nasty little black Mexican nipper. Trying to control the pair of them back there, I saw very little of the Savoie countryside. That part of the Savoie is a favorite place for hikers. They'd lose nails out of their hiking boots, and almost invariably the little Ford's tires would get a puncture. Gertrude would pull off to the side of the road and she and Alice B. Toklas would take out their picnic things from the car and find a nice cozy spot to overlook it all. They'd sit and chat and eat while I would change the tire, harassed, as you can imagine, by Basket and Pepe.

INTERVIEWER

What were your impressions of Stein?

LAUGHLIN

She had great natural charm, tremendous charisma. Marvelous head. Those wonderful flashing eyes. A deep, firm voice. So I couldn't help but be very much impressed by her at times, except that often she'd erupt with crazy ideas. She thought Hitler was a great man . . . this *before* the war, of course, but how a Jewess could be attracted to such a notion at any time is difficult to understand. She was certainly a woman of strong opinions—indeed to the point of megalomania. She felt she had influenced everyone. We had a big fight one day when I mentioned I was reading Proust. She said, "How can you read junk like that? Don't you know, J., that Proust and Joyce both copied their work from *The Making of Americans*?" She finally cooled on me. I simply didn't accept everything she said. That was disrespectful.

INTERVIEWER

And then you met Pound that same year?

LAUGHLIN

Dudley Fitts, my old teacher at Choate, who had been cor-

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responding with Pound for a number of years, gave me a letter of introduction to him. Fitts was a great linguist; he'd read everyone. He was a wonderful letter writer—his letters entranced Pound because here was someone who'd read in all the languages. Pound must have remembered. Because that fall, after my experience with Gertrude Stein, I went up to Paris, lived in a tiny room in an insurance office which I rented for seven dollars a month, and after a while, I wrote to Ezra, not expecting a reply, really, just asking if I could come down to Rapallo to see him . . . and to my astonishment he sent me a telegram: "Visibility high." So I went down then to Rapallo. Ezra and I hit it off immediately. He found me an eager student, and certainly he was the thwarted professor. He found a room for me in the flat of an old German lady and I was enrolled in what he called the "Ezuversity". No tuition.

INTERVIEWER

How did the courses go?

LAUGHLIN

The Ezuversity instruction was mostly a monologue about the mail he'd received that morning. His mornings were devoted to his correspondence. He used to say that postage was his highest living expense. Then we'd have lunch in the dining room of the Albergo Rapallo, and then after the snooze he'd take, we would go swimming or play tennis. One of the wonderful things about those monologues was his mimetic ability. He could imitate Joyce, how he talked, or how Yeats talked. His stories were endless, and very funny, and what I remember about them—over all those years—was that I never heard him tell an off-color story.

INTERVIEWER

But he could be prickly.

LAUGHLIN

Oh, you could never predict what he was going to do—

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even from the very first. I remember that one summer we drove up to Salzburg—Ezra, Olga Rudge, and my Harvard classmate John Slocum—to the *Festspielhaus*, where Toscanini was conducting Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Ezra didn't think much of Beethoven. After about twenty minutes into the opera, Ezra rose up and said in a very clear voice, "No wonder! The man had syphilis!" He started out, and all of us, of course, felt we had to file out with him. Toscanini was absolutely unfazed. He continued to conduct.

INTERVIEWER

How did Pound help you get started with New Directions when you got back to Harvard?

LAUGHLIN

He wrote letters to all his writer friends—to William Carlos Williams, to Kay Boyle, Cocteau, dozens of them, saying, "If you have a manuscript send it to this worthy young man." I started all this with complete innocence. The first book we published was a very funny one called *Pianos of Sympathy* by Wayne Andrews who in those days called himself, for some reason, Montague O'Reilly. It was printed by the people in Vermont who printed the *Harvard Advocate*—delicious stories about old gentlemen with long hair and a fetish about piano strings—two hundred copies in blue covers, and then two hundred more in red covers. That was the start.

INTERVIEWER

What was the reception when you started publishing books while still at Harvard? Were other students aware that you were doing it?

LAUGHLIN

The people around the *Advocate* were aware; and they were interested. They thought it was different and enterprising. But the general student body took no interest whatever.

INTERVIEWER

Was there any sense among the folks over at the *Advocate*

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that this was a precocious, ambitious project?

LAUGHLIN

I think the *Advocate* crowd were, by the time I started doing books, rather used to me because the first step in my publishing was when I began, with a couple of friends, such as John Slocum, to infiltrate texts by non-Harvard people into the magazine. These were writers whom I had met through Pound and others. I remember we printed a Pound *Canto* and a Henry Miller story which was banned by the police. It was a piece called "Glittering Pie," which by present standards would be considered very innocuous, but it was Miller enough for the young lawyer who was running for district attorney in Cambridge to have the issue seized and get himself a lot of publicity in the newspapers about decadence at Harvard. It was such a harmless piece. In it was a joke about leis, you know Hawaiian leis, as a double entendre. It was charming and very funny. Henry could be extremely funny. The way we got out of that scrape was this: through some friends in the athletic department, we got the district attorney candidate two seats on the 50-yard line for the Harvard-Yale game. So he forgot about it.

INTERVIEWER

The name that has probably come up more than any other in interviews about your life has been your Aunt Leila. What made her so special for you?

LAUGHLIN

She was a very loving, and at the same time, powerful-minded woman. I came to live with her here in Connecticut, shortly after I started going to boarding school, because I didn't care for Pittsburgh at all. She more or less adopted me and spoiled me. At the same time she was constantly telling me what I should do and what I shouldn't do. Although our personalities and interests were greatly different, we became very attached to one another. She was a symbol of the family tradition. She had all the old virtues.

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INTERVIEWER

So, in a sense, she became your family.

LAUGHLIN

Yes. I adored my father, who was a marvelous man, very unlike a businessman. In fact, he wasn't a businessman. He stopped working in the steel mills when he was forty, the day that his father died, and devoted the rest of his life to gentlemanly pursuits, such as fly-fishing and duck shooting. We were very close. If I asked him for money, he'd say, "Are you going to publish some more of those books that I can't understand?" And I'd say, "Yes." And he'd give it to me. I was fond of my mother, too. But I simply could not get on in Pittsburgh.

INTERVIEWER

What was it about Pittsburgh that made things difficult?

LAUGHLIN

There was no one for me to talk to. I didn't have any friends interested in literature, and most of the kids were tearing around raising hell. It was a country-club existence, which didn't appeal to me at all. It was a stifling town. So I moved here to Connecticut.

INTERVIEWER

Was your Aunt Leila modern in her attitude about literature?

LAUGHLIN

She was very down on certain books I published; she couldn't stand Henry Miller. I was very careful not to undertake the *Tropics*, because I knew it would set the whole family on its ear. She thought he was obscene and an anarchist.

INTERVIEWER

There are obvious disadvantages to being this far away from New York City; what are the advantages that made you

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decide to stay in the country all through the years?

LAUGHLIN

I liked the country. My aunt converted a stable into an office for me. She was very good about being nice to the various writers who came to work for me here—the Patchens, Jimmy Higgins, Hubert Creekmore, and others. It was a pleasant place to function. New Directions didn't move away from here until the business became so big I could no longer run it from the country; it was hard to keep help and there was no close access to printers and binders. At a certain point it became obvious that I couldn't handle the work from here with floating literary helper staffs.

INTERVIEWER

Were you deliberately using writers as floating helpers?

LAUGHLIN

It was a definite part of the program to try to provide employment for writers I knew who didn't have a job. Of course, it wasn't much of a job for them, because in those days we were selling very few books and the wages that I was able to pay were at subsistence level. It did give them some writing time.

INTERVIEWER

How much?

LAUGHLIN

It was up to them. I was usually somewhere else. In those days I was often out on the road trying to sell books, or I was out at the ski resort in Alta, Utah, where I had business interests. Most winters I was in Utah for months. So I corresponded with the office by daily letters and they would send letters out to me. As long as they got the books and the bills out and kept things rolling, they were pretty much on their own.

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Gertrude Stein with Basket and JL with Pepe. "On the roadside near Gertrude's country place, Bilignin, near Belley, Ain. Must have been 1934. Taken during a pause for me to change a flat tire on Gertrude's Ford." Photo: Alice B. Toklas.

The New Directions staff in the old "stable" office in the late 1940s. L to R: Robert Lowry, the novelist; Hubert Creekmore, the poet and novelist; JL; Susan Lustig. Photo: Polly Forbes-Johnson.

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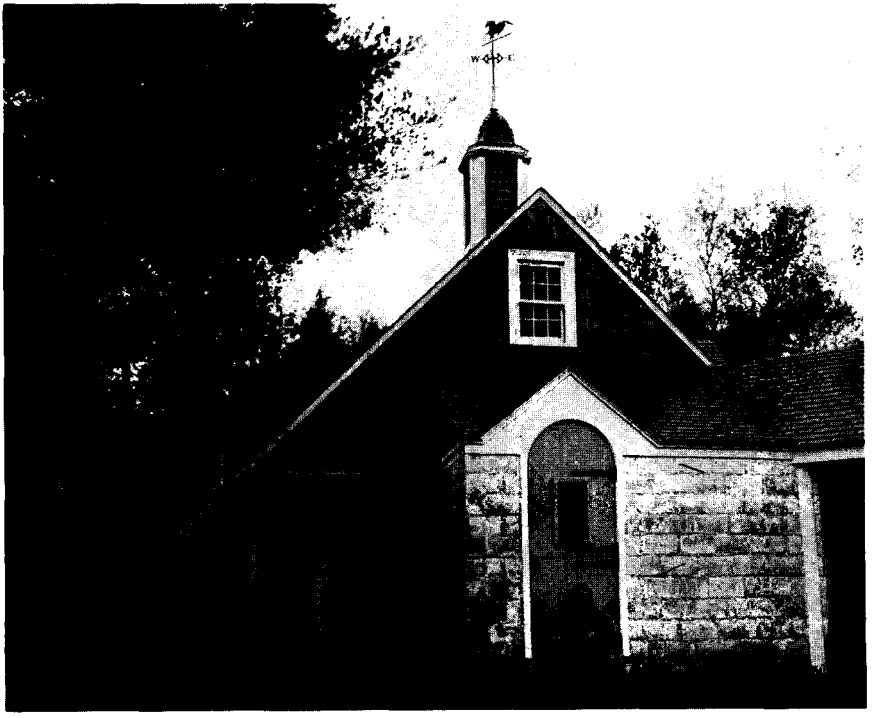
JL and Ezra Pound.
"A lunch stop in the Dolomites in 1935, on the drive from Venice to Salzburg."
Photo: Olga Rudge.

Below:
The old "stable" office of ND with JL sitting in front.
Photo: Polly Forbes-Johnson.



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INTERVIEWER

How did you manage to get Ezra Pound to come to New Directions?

LAUGHLIN

At the time we started he was being published by Farrar and Rinehart, a distinguished old firm, but they made the odd mistake—though how could they have known?—of sending him at Christmastime a copy of his latest book, bound in leather. His judgment of this, quite unjustified, was, "They must be crooks." I have no idea what his rationalization was. So he took his work away from them and gave it to me. I doubt if it bothered Farrar and Rinehart very much, because in those early days his work wasn't selling. We published *Polite Essays*, which weren't at all, and *The ABC of Economics*—a text I'd still recommend to anyone who's puzzled about inflation. We've done, I'd think, a total of twenty books of Ezra's, and I am proud to say that, with one or two exceptions, all of them are in print.

INTERVIEWER

Do they continue to sell?

LAUGHLIN

The *Selected Poems*, *The ABC of Reading*. And the *Cantos*, of course. As for the rest of them: three or four hundred copies a year.

INTERVIEWER

How much of an influence did Pound have on you—that is to say in those first days with him in Rapallo when you were nineteen years old?

LAUGHLIN

I think that perhaps in earlier interviews or talks I may not have sufficiently stressed the way that Ezra completely changed, to use one of his phrases, my *forma mentis*, my way of looking at the world. I went to him with fairly convention-

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al views about almost everything, and I left him with either very eccentric or radical views about everything—views which have persisted with me to the present day.

INTERVIEWER

Social Credit?

LAUGHLIN

Social Credit, political things, literary concepts. Poets whom I still like to read for my own pleasure are the ones he told me I should, the Pound canon as you find it in the *ABC of Reading*. Pound pushed me away from the kind of literature which was embalmed in the "beaneries" to a much more interlingual, international literature. That has persisted to this day. A great deal of what we do now at New Directions is still translations of foreign books. Last winter we did a Swedish novel, a Hungarian novel, and a Brazilian novel. And if you look at our annual anthology you'll find that often a third of it is made up of translations of foreign poets from all over the world. That concept came largely from Ezra, who in his critical writings was always saying that you could not understand poetry if you only worked with one language. He was a comparatist in the good sense of actually looking at texts in different languages and seeing what the writers were doing with them and comparing them one with another. He loved to compare Flaubert with Henry James, for example. He made judgments of that kind. To him it was all one world literature, even including the Chinese.

INTERVIEWER

Did he get you learning foreign languages—Italian, for example?

LAUGHLIN

I learned a certain amount of Italian from going with him to the Italian cinema in Rapallo. The movies were simply awful, but Ezra loved them. He'd sit up in the first gallery with a cowboy hat on and his feet up on the rail, eating

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peanuts, roaring with laughter. I only went because through the roar of his laughing I was able to add . . . well, a little to my understanding of the language. Pound also arranged for me to have Italian lessons with an aged spinster named Signorina Canessa, who hated Mussolini because he had put a tax on canaries. She must have been at least ninety years old. We'd converse and I read the Italian newspapers and talked to people around town. I was gradually building up my Italian, but it was still strange to me, and it still is strange to me now. In the filming job last summer when we were working on the Pound documentary, I had to interview a lot of people in Italian who had known Pound. I could do it, but it was still a foreign language to me; whereas French, which I got earlier in my Swiss school, is still a foreign language, but much less so.

INTERVIEWER

Have we gotten to most of the things you wanted to add about the Rapallo experience?

LAUGHLIN

There was the wonderful friendship with Dorothy Pound, who was such a lovely lady, so kind to me. She used to read Henry James to me after tea—short stories. She meant a great deal to me. She was at meals, the lecture meals, when Ezra would hold forth, and she'd chime in. And she'd make tea for us after we'd finished playing tennis or swimming. Then Ezra would take a little snooze, and she'd take me into her studio—she was a very good painter in the Vorticist tradition—to read to me.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any other interests outside your life at New Directions?

LAUGHLIN

I think you have to bear in mind the skiing mania. It's been a big part of my life. I was crazy about skiing and did

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a lot of it. I got involved in a ski resort out in Utah. I spent a lot of time out there in the early days. I married a Salt Lake girl, who liked skiing. I lived there in a suburb of Salt Lake and went up to the ski place every day to work. It was a very strong drive.

INTERVIEWER

Was there any relation at all to the literary?

LAUGHLIN

It was pretty much apart. It was a much more physical activity than writing. Some of my poems come out of that period. "The Mountain Afterglow" was written at Alta. There are often references in the poems to snow or to tracks in the snow. And I wrote magazine articles about skiing.

INTERVIEWER

What was it about skiing that was so attractive?

LAUGHLIN

The incessant movement, the rhythm, and the beauty of the mountains. Skiing is a very good sport because you never get to the end of it. There's always more you can do to ski better, more you can perfect in your technique. This is a challenge, especially when you're ungainly like me.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of skiing did you do when you were skiing competitively?

LAUGHLIN

I did them all. I did downhill and slalom, I jumped a little, and I did cross-country.

INTERVIEWER

That must have been interesting when you jumped, given your height.

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Dr. William Carlos Williams with his wife, Florence, taken in March, 1961, in Rutherford, N.J. Given to JL in March, 1971, by Donald Webb.

Mountaineering shot. JL on a peak in the Grossglockner range in Austria, where he was climbing with the guide, Eberhart Kneisel, about 1936. Photo: Eberhart Kneisel.

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LAUGHLIN

I never got anywhere; I flapped around in the air. Jumpers are compact, like good golfers.

INTERVIEWER

You suggested that you didn't see too much connection between the publishing or the writing on the one hand and the skiing on the other. Did they conflict with one another?

LAUGHLIN

No, because the mail would come out to me from the office every day. I'd ski for a few hours, then I'd go in to the typewriter and answer the mail. It worked very nicely. I wasn't in an office all day; I was in a pleasant place.

INTERVIEWER

When W. C. Williams got upset with you in the 1940s and the early 1950s, he implied several times that your passion for skiing was interfering with your work at New Directions. Do you think there was anything to his reaction?

LAUGHLIN

I could have been more attentive had I been East, so I think his criticism was justified. But skiing meant a lot to me and I wasn't going to give it up. In that connection, there's a nice postcard that Ezra sent me about my skiing mania. He wrote, "ARE YOU DOING ANYTHING? Of course, if you spend 3/4s of your time sliding down ice cream cones on a tin tea-tray. If you can't be bothered with detail, why t'hell don't you get Stan Nott[1] who could run it. Then you could scratch yr arse on Pike's Peak to your 'eart's content." And then in another card he said:

> Here lies our noble lord the Jas
> Whose word no man relies on.
> He never breathed an unkind word,
> His promises are pizin.

1 Stanley Nott, the London publisher of Pound's "Money" pamphlets.

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And that of course comes from Rochester's epitaph on Charles II, which reads:

> Here lies a great and mighty king
> whose promise none relies on.
> He never said a foolish thing
> And never did a wise one.

INTERVIEWER

When it got to the point where skiing was such an important element of your life, were you losing interest in New Directions?

LAUGHLIN

Not at all. But I saw the ski resort, apart from the pleasure of skiing, as an opportunity to make a little money to support the publishing, so that I wouldn't have to keep going begging to my father and my aunt. It didn't make much money at first, but now it's in the black.

INTERVIEWER

You still have it?

LAUGHLIN

Yes, my family group is the majority stockholder, but I don't run it anymore. I have excellent managers: I go out occasionally. But now on a Sunday at Alta there are four thousand people skiing. They're like ants on the slopes. Whereas when I was out there, some days there would be only five or six people on the mountain. It was lonely and beautiful.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see finance and economic issues having a direct influence on art?

LAUGHLIN

Oh yes. That, of course, was what Ezra was always talking about, that business and wealth did not support the artists

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and writers. That, in fact, was one reason Ezra became interested in Mussolini. He knew that Mussolini was an intelligent, rather cultivated man. He'd been a Socialist journalist. Ezra hoped that Mussolini would throttle the banks and could be converted into a patron of arts and letters. You remember the Renaissance princes, such as Sigismondo Malatesta. Ezra admired Sigismondo not because he went out and beat up other princes' hired armies, but because he brought the best Greek scholars, such as Gemistus Plethon, and Italian artists such as Alberti and Duccio and Piero della Francesca, to his court and he built the Tempio Malatestiana in Rimini for his girlfriend Ixotta.

INTERVIEWER

Did Pound succeed in any measure in getting his views to Mussolini?

LAUGHLIN

As far as I know, he never succeeded at all with Mussolini. He had one audience in Rome with him, which he arranged through the secretary, who put out a copy of the *Cantos* on Mussolini's desk. Ezra marched in and Mussolini picked it up and said, "*Ma questo é divertente*." That pleased Ezra very much. Then they talked for ten minutes about economics. Ezra told Il Duce what he should do about the Italian banks, and that was the end of the audience and the end of a beautiful friendship. That was the only time he saw him.

INTERVIEWER

They didn't become disenchanted with one another?

LAUGHLIN

I think Mussolini's aides had told him that Ezra was a crackpot, but he felt he should see him because he was a famous poet.

INTERVIEWER

Where did you have your most serious difficulties in get-

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ting New Directions off the ground?

LAUGHLIN

The learning process was difficult. I had to learn so much so quickly, how to make a book, and how to market a book. That was the greatest difficulty. But there was never any shortage of manuscripts. First beginning with Ezra's friends and then going to Williams's friends and then moving through Yvor Winters's group, there were always plenty of manuscripts to do. That was no problem. In those days—it was fairly soon after the Depression—the big publishers just weren't doing much literary publishing.

INTERVIEWER

What was it like to be developing the press on your own?

LAUGHLIN

It was very exciting. It was something new and different and gave me a sense of action or accomplishment even though the books didn't sell. It kept me busy. I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER

Was the excitement in the variety?

LAUGHLIN

There were so many different things I had to do. I had to keep in touch with the authors and read the manuscripts, and I had to copy-edit manuscripts, and I had to find printers and binders. Then I had to get up ads and do the catalogs. I had to try to sell the books. Publishing, when it's a one-man operation, is an extremely varied occupation. It isn't like a big firm where each person does a different job. I don't know that I looked at it very objectively; I just did it. It seemed to come, although I knew nothing about it when I started—I was a quick learner in some ways, though I never learned promotion and never will. The printers and the binders taught me a lot, what to do and how to do it. There were good printers around Cambridge. The man from whom I learned

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the most about the beauty of a book was Giovanni Mardersteig of the Officina Bodoni in Verona. He was the greatest handprinter in Europe until he died a few years ago. I would visit him when I was in Italy. He did three or four superb books for me. Gide's "Theseus," two Pound texts, and a Dylan Thomas. They were limited editions, very expensive. He showed me a little bit about how he designed books, which was very valuable in establishing a criterion. Peter Beilenson taught me an enormous amount. He was a printer in Mount Vernon, New York, who died much too young. He printed many of my books in the old days, including those early fat annuals. He was a fine craftsman and designer.

INTERVIEWER

Rexroth has talked about the fine, limited editions you did in the early days and was upset that you had worked into other formats. Does what he said make sense to you?

LAUGHLIN

His rendition wasn't exactly correct. The early books were done in Harvard Square and they were not limited editions. They were just, I think, quite nicely printed books. Rexroth always had this romantic concept that he was going to become editor of New Directions and we would only do beautiful limited editions. But it was more in *his* mind than in mine. I have always liked to do hand-printed editions; there have been ten or fifteen of them over the years.

INTERVIEWER

One of your objectives with New Directions has been to make quality literature available to people who might otherwise not be able to afford it. That philosophy conflicts with limited editions, doesn't it?

LAUGHLIN

It does, but the two can go together. In the early days we were able to do that. The Poets of the Year Series sold for, I think, fifty cents each in pamphlet form and one dollar each

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in paper over boards. I could do that then because I could get those thirty-two-page pamphlets printed for $300. But we gave up that Series—after we did forty-two numbers. We wanted it to be on a subscription basis, but we could never build up a subscription list. People preferred to pick and choose. I think the subscription list only got up to about six hundred copies. The early New Classics Series sold for a dollar and a half. You could do that in those days before inflation. Then I started the paperbacks. Those we were selling, some of the thin ones, for a dollar and the thick ones for a dollar and a half. Now the same books are $5.95 because of the damn inflation. So the concept of trying to produce cheap classics has just gone out the window.

INTERVIEWER

Were you given much advice in the early days at New Directions . . . working with writers such as Pound and Williams?

LAUGHLIN

Both were such tremendous people, and their letters were so interesting. In the same letter Ezra could be both very sweet and very cranky. He'd want me to re-issue the autobiography of Martin Van Buren and the collected works of Alexander Del Mar. Del Mar was a minor official in the U. S. Treasury in the reign of Grant. He was an early credit crank and monetary theorist who wrote about eight books, the most famous of which is called *The History of Monetary Crimes*. Ezra loved him. He was always after me to publish it.

INTERVIEWER

You never did, did you?

LAUGHLIN

No, but Ezra did finally get some Del Mar published. One of those disciples of his at St. Elizabeth's Hospital put it out in the Square Dollar Series.

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INTERVIEWER

How did he react when you "declined" to publish people he was pushing?

LAUGHLIN

Among his postcards there are any number of funny comments. Do you want me to try to find a typical one? "Possibly a politic move on Jas's part. Great deal of sewage to float a few boats. Possibly useful. Nasty way to educate the public. Four percent food. Ninety-six percent poison."

INTERVIEWER

He called you "Jas"?

LAUGHLIN

Yes. E. P. called me "Jas," as his family and "Poundians" still do.

INTERVIEWER

Do you recall any moments when you wondered whether you really wanted to stay with New Directions?

LAUGHLIN

I've never had any doubts about that. New Directions is my life.

INTERVIEWER

Did any low moments arise because an author was threatening to leave New Directions?

LAUGHLIN

I was terribly upset when Paul Bowles's agent stole him away from us. Can't remember her name. Paul's first book, *The Sheltering Sky*, had been turned down by every publisher in New York. Paul was a friend of Tennessee's. Tennessee brought the manuscript around and asked, "Would you like to publish this?" I read it and said, "You bet." We did very well with it: it went through seven printings. Then this

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agent got a big offer from Random House for Bowles's next book. Random House was one of the ones that turned down the first book. I couldn't meet the advance, and so they stole him away. That really hurt me and made me mad.

INTERVIEWER

That doesn't fit with the basic publishing ethic.

LAUGHLIN

There are no ethics in publishing. This goes on every day. Of course, Tennessee Williams was wonderfully loyal. We had an understanding that we would do the plays and stories and poetry. If he wanted to write something special, he'd go out and get some big money for it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you know why Tennessee Williams stayed with you?

LAUGHLIN

Maybe it was because we were the first to publish him. He knew that I liked his poetry and his stories very much, which were important to him, as well as the plays. And it's just the

Tennessee Williams. "This looks as though it were taken in the garden of his house in Key West in the 1950s. Photo ignotus."

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way he was. I think he trusted me. I'm a trustee for one of his sister's trusts. She's not well, and I guess he knew that I'd take care of things. I was really shook up when Tennessee died. I wrote the following lines for him a few hours after I heard about it. I know they are sentimental, but that's the way I felt:

TENNESSEE

called death the sudden subway and now he has taken that train
but there are so many good things to remember
first the young man in sloppy pants and a torn grey sweater
whom I met at Lincoln Kirstein's cocktail party
he was very shy and had hidden himself in a side room
I too was shy but we got talking
he told me he wrote plays and that he loved Hart Crane
he carried the poems of Crane in his knapsack wherever he hitch-hiked
then his first night of glory in Chicago
when he and Laurette Taylor made a new American theater
I remember happy days with him in London and Italy and Key West
and how often friends and writers who were down on their luck
told me how generously he had helped them
(but you would never hear about that from him)
so many fine things to remember
that I can live again in my mind
until it is my turn to join him on the sudden subway.

INTERVIEWER

Back at the beginning, it must have been a satisfying feeling when Williams's career really took off.

LAUGHLIN

It was very exciting. Here was a man who had an almost impoverished youth, who was struggling to publish with great difficulty. He had tough times, only occasionally plac-

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It was James Laughlin in the beginning and it remains James Laughlin now, with never a disruption ~~XX~~ or moment of misunderstanding in a friendship and professional relationship that has now lasted for forty years, or more.

By nature I was meant more for the quieter and purer world of poetry than for the theatre into which necessity drew me.

~~* And now that things draw toward a close, it is the poetry, or the poetry in the theatre and the stories, that is what I have XXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXX to offer the world of letters.~~

I am in no position to assess the value of this offering but I do trust that James Laughlin is able to view it without regret.

If he can, I cannot imagine a more rewarding accolade.

Tennessee Williams
January, 1983

* And now as a time for reckoning seems near, I know that it is the poetry that distinguishes the writing when it is distinguished, that of the plays and of the stories, yes, that is what I had primarily to offer you.

(I prefer this re-write of third

A message from Tennessee Williams to JL on the occasion of the National Arts Club Ceremony in 1983, at which JL was honored.

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ing a story in some small magazine. Then he arrived at the pinnacle with his first play. Suddenly, with *The Glass Menagerie*, everything changed. I went out to Chicago for the opening there with Laurette Taylor. It was fun and wonderful. I was very happy for him. Then, of course, he had a personal problem in handling success. It frightened him a little because he wasn't used to it.

INTERVIEWER

What are some of the other landmark moments that made you say, "Well, that's really satisfying"?

LAUGHLIN

It was pleasing when Jack Hawkes first had a full-page review in the Sunday *Times'* book section. He should have gotten it for his first book, *The Cannibal*, twenty years before. It was just as brilliant a book, but there is always the time lag with original work. It took Jack years to get proper attention. And some reviewers still say he's "too difficult." What do they think Joyce is?

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that response arises because he writes difficult material in the European tradition?

LAUGHLIN

That's only a part of it. There are some pretty difficult writers who get as much attention as Jack. Barth, Pynchon, Barthelme. Perhaps it's something about his special sensibility.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean the macabre element?

LAUGHLIN

Yes. That's very hard for some readers. They say: "I can't swallow this."

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INTERVIEWER

In your own poetry you've always striven for clarity, yet you've published so many writers in recent years who are relatively difficult and obscure.

LAUGHLIN

Ezra always used to say that some poetry had to be difficult because of its content. He cited Cavalcanti, who is difficult. And Dante, who is in parts not easy. I agree that with poetry some subject matter requires, I hope not obscurity, but complexity of approach and language. For example, a great poet, Robert Duncan, has created his own imaginative and spiritual world to the point where he has to use new language and new syntax and new form to express it.

INTERVIEWER

How does the work of Hawkes and Abish fit in with your own tastes?

LAUGHLIN

I like their work. I understand what they're doing. I don't insist that everyone write light verse the way I do.

INTERVIEWER

That doesn't seem like a fair description of your work.

LAUGHLIN

I like to be understood by ordinary people. But many poets aim higher, and they should. George Oppen wants to speak to philosophical poets. So does Gustaf Sobin. They need this kind of metaphysical complexity to express themselves.

INTERVIEWER

Do you publish people like that because you like what they're doing?

LAUGHLIN

Yes, if we publish someone, I feel there's something good

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there. Occasionally we do something I'm not mad about because one of the staff wants to do it very much. I accept their taste and their judgment. But with me a book has got, as Gertrude Stein said, "to ring the bell."

INTERVIEWER

Have there been writers you've really wanted and just didn't get?

LAUGHLIN

We were speaking of the fact that I don't "lift" authors. I had been a friend of "Cal" Lowell from college days at Harvard, and I would have loved to publish him, but he was published first by Ronald Lane Latimer. Since he was being published by a small press I made no move, and then the first thing I knew, Harcourt Brace had made a move, and there he went. But we remained good friends all our lives. I admired him very much. Then there is Guy Davenport, who I think is tremendous. I've known Guy for a long time. But he didn't publish much in magazines and I hadn't really followed his writing. I didn't write to him, and North Point Press took him on. Then there's this young lady I met out at Centrum in Port Townsend, Carolyn Forché, an absolutely beautiful poet. Rexroth had told me about her, oh, six or seven years ago. I wrote to her—no answer. When I met her at Centrum, the first thing she said was, "The reason I didn't answer your letter was that I didn't have any new poems then. But the next one I write I'm going to send to you." She's being published by Harper, so she's tied up. I think she's going to be the next Denise Levertov.

INTERVIEWER

What have been the most surprising publishing ventures—the ones that made you say: "I just didn't expect that to happen"?

LAUGHLIN

I think, on the positive side, it would be Hesse's *Sid-*

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dhartha. Henry Miller pushed me into doing that, and it became a great best seller. Another book which became a great best seller was Ferlinghetti's *Coney Island of the Mind.* It's a wonderful book, but I didn't expect it to sell over a million copies when I took it on. On the other side there have been cases where a very good book just did nothing. The stories of Tomasso Landolfi, for example; his collection called *Gogol's Wife.* Also the English poet Edwin Brock's autobiography, *Here, Now, and Always*. A strong book and beautifully written. Nothing happened. You're so much at the mercy of the reviewers. If you don't get reviews, if people don't hear about the books. . . . Another disappointing case was the *Selected Writings* of Blaise Cendrars, who was another great enthusiasm of Henry Miller's.

INTERVIEWER

Is there any pattern to these particular disappointments, a similar feature in the work?

LAUGHLIN

It's harder to get a foreign writer known.

INTERVIEWER

Helen Wolff has said that the critical problems in this country are poor quality reviews, but even worse, prejudice among the reviewing community against foreign writers.

LAUGHLIN

I think that's true. We did four foreign novels in 1982, by Johan Borgen, Lars Gustafsson, Istvan Orkeny, and Ledo Ivo. Now we were lucky on the Gustafsson because John Updike liked it and reviewed it in the *New Yorker.* It's into a second paperback edition. The Ivo and the Orkeny haven't done as well. They're all very good.

INTERVIEWER

So in a sense, a lot of your disappointments have come out of lack of reaction—

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LAUGHLIN

Neglect of books that I thought were important.

INTERVIEWER

W. C. Williams once took you to task for what he referred to as an "insufficiently refined palate" in choosing writers for the New Directions anthology.

LAUGHLIN

He was probably right.

INTERVIEWER

Do you believe that you've gotten some "breakthrough" people precisely because you didn't strive for the highly refined palate?

LAUGHLIN

The annuals varied in quality a great deal from year to year. Probably the best was the one in the blue cover that you can't find now, ND 1939. An extraordinary number. That had the Lorca play, *Blood Wedding*, probably the first Lorca play translated here; it had my piece on the Samuel Greenberg manuscripts, which showed how Hart Crane stole from Greenberg; it had Harry Levin on Joyce; it had George Orwell on Henry Miller. It was a knockout issue. But I couldn't do that every time. The material wasn't offered, and I didn't have the money to commission things.

INTERVIEWER

Williams went on to say you've got to decide not to publish people who aren't ready yet or people who've been ready but have slipped.

LAUGHLIN

I disagree with him. I have always wanted to encourage the young. That has been one of the primary purposes of the annual. So I have printed a lot who perhaps weren't yet ready but who became good later. As for the good writers who were

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slipping, they needed encouragement, too.

INTERVIEWER

Have your feelings over the years about New Directions changed at all?

LAUGHLIN

I don't think they've changed much, although in the early years I was much more belligerent. I felt that we were the only ones who were doing anything good in literature and all the other publishers were a bunch of bums. I remember writing a letter to Bennett Cerf: "Dear Bennett, You have just committed one of the great crimes against American culture of our day. You have let Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* go out of print. Sincerely yours."

INTERVIEWER

Have you mellowed because things have changed?

LAUGHLIN

I've come to accept that we live in a very imperfect publishing world and that we cannot expect people who have to make a living out of it, as I don't, to do the impossible. I've just relaxed and said, "We'll hoe our little row and not fuss about the others." But in the early days I was spikey as hell.

INTERVIEWER

Is more being done by other publishers now?

LAUGHLIN

Yes. Take Gordon Lish at Knopf. He's now publishing Ray Carver, which is a pretty courageous thing to do. There are people like Gordon in most of the big houses. Jonathan Galassi at Random House is another "discoverer" and great on foreign translations. Call them hidden spies of literature who are working under cover and slipping things through. The other thing that I think is very encouraging is the good stuff that is being done by the small presses. Ferlinghetti's

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books, Jonathan Williams's books, Capra Press, John Martin's Black Sparrow books, Scott Walker's Grey Wolf Press, and David Godine are all very good. And the North Point Press —obviously modeled on New Directions, as Turnbull, who backs it, told me when he was here. And that's very flattering. He came here to receive the laying-on of hands, which I was delighted to give him. He has very good people working for him. He's using good paper, he's Smyth-sewing instead of gluing, he is using headbands, and he is doing books of high literary merit.

INTERVIEWER

So the libraries are not going to have the problems with North Point books falling apart the way so many other books are now.

LAUGHLIN

I can't touch my set of the *Little Review* now because the paper flakes. There is a related story about Djuna Barnes. We were planning a special hardbound edition of *Nightwood*. She insisted she had to have paper that would last a thousand years. We asked the paper dealers, and they said, "No, it's impossible. You can't unless you go to an Italian or French handmade paper, which would be exorbitant. We cannot *produce* a paper that we will guarantee for more than five hundred years." So we finally printed the book on Curtis Rag, which the manufacturer guaranteed for five hundred years, but Djuna was never happy about it.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever ask her how she was going to check the guarantee?

LAUGHLIN

No.

INTERVIEWER

You've arranged for a New Directions trust. What does that involve?

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LAUGHLIN

The way this trust is written it will provide money for New Directions to go on for many years. But it is up to the trustees to be certain that quality is being maintained. If it isn't, they can terminate it.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned you don't go out after authors. Do you solicit manuscripts?

LAUGHLIN

Oh yes. If one of us, myself or someone on the staff, reads something in a magazine that seems promising, he or she will write: "Can we see a manuscript?" The annuals also feed into books.

INTERVIEWER

How tough has it been to keep things fresh at New Directions?

LAUGHLIN

Very difficult, because my taste, in poetry especially, goes back to the days of Pound and Williams. While I can recognize the genius of a Carolyn Forché or an Allen Grossman or a Gustaf Sobin, I don't have much flair for picking from the latest crop. New Directions is moving strongly into publishing the remaining works of the great moderns. We've got ten books of both-sided Pound correspondence under contract. We have books of W. C. Williams correspondence under contract. And we have a program for publishing the unpublished manuscripts of William Carlos Williams that are in the Yale and Buffalo libraries. Very interesting things. And the unpublished work of H.D. [Hilda Doolittle] that is at Yale.

INTERVIEWER

Could you describe the process by which you make a publication decision?

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LAUGHLIN

First one of the editors reads a manuscript; then the others read it. If the first reader likes it and if they all like it, they send it up to me.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have the final say?

LAUGHLIN

It has to be a majority decision. A few times I have thrown my weight around when I cared passionately about a book.

—**Richard Ziegfield**

This concludes the first part of a two-part series. The final installment will appear in the winter issue.

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James Laughlin

FIVE STOLEN POEMS

Little Dog

you must get well right
away your mistress loves

you and she needs you to
keep her company while I

am not there I love you
because she does so you

must get well right away.

(Stolen from Catullus: "Lugete o Veneres Cupidinesque," in which the poet mourns the death of his girlfriend's pet sparrow.)

Two Onanists

were lovers they made
love by mail each try-

ing to outdo the other
with lewd logodaedalies.

(Stolen, in general, from Juvenal.)

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Nothing That's Lovely Can My Love Escape

How many cowgirls did the
blue God Krishna love doz-

ens the old books say and
so it is with me nothing

that's lovely can my love
escape like Baby Krishna

for his butter ball I'm
greedy greedy greedy I

was not born like Krishna
on a lotus leaf but yet I

want to play as he did in
his palm grove long ago.

(Stolen from various books about the Hindu gods. For the Krishna stories see Nivedita & Coomaraswamy: *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*. I brought back from India a little bronze of Baby Krishna playing with his butter ball and a Telugu glass painting of Krishna on his lotus leaf guarded by a cobra. Krishna's favorite among the gopis who herded the kine was Radha. The love duets of Krishna and Radha are the basis of Bengali poetry. See *In Praise of Krishna*, translated by E. C. Dimock, Jr. and Denise Levertov.)

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With My Third Eye

I see what's past and what's
to come I see you as a little

girl you wore your hair in
pigtails then telling the

other children what was right
and what was wrong & then I

watch you in your ashram time
wearing your saffron robe your

head now shaved telling those
other nuns what's right what's

wrong this is your karma this
your destiny prostrate your-

self a thousand times and say
the prayer om mani padme hum.

(Stolen from various books on Tibetan and Tantric Buddhism. "Om mani padme hum" is the best known of the Tibetan Buddhist mantras. The novice aspiring to dzogchen, the "great perfection," prostrates himself 100,000 times while chanting the mantra, which means, literally, "the jewel at the heart of the lotus," but has many symbolic ramifications. The concept of the (mystical) Third Eye appears to have begun as magic in the Swat Valley of India and was probably brought to Tibet in the 8th century A.D. by Padma Sambhava, the "great guru," who sold it to the hardy but superstitious mountaineers. An ashram is an Indian hermitage. "Ashram time" is the fourth and last stage of the Brahmanical scheme of life, when the householder leaves his family and becomes a hermit [vanaprastha] or homeless mendicant [sannyasi].)

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She Seemed To Know

that she'd been designed for
the sport of Gods not like

sad Tess in Wessex more like
the rapes of Zeus like Leda

or Europa so she goes in a
gleam of Cos in a slither

of dyed stuff waiting for it
to happen and wanting it to

happen to her in a gleam of
Cos ever looking skyward for

the appearance of the God.

"In a gleam of Cos..." Pound's rescription of Propertius, I,2,2: "*et tenues Coa veste movere sinus...*"

Drawn from Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, at the end, "...The President of the Immortals ... had ended his sport with Tess. "

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Out West and Back East

Michael Brownstein

Out West

One at a time, the armed men come down dusty, winding gullies to the steeper arroyos, their chaps and boots glinting in the afternoon sunlight. They descend gulches to the floor of the canyon, a thin band of trees and rock that winds along the creekside. Sixteen men who have never seen one another before, but who are expecting one another, since no one else would care to make the journey to this canyon, or is even aware of its existence.

On a narrow strip of sand, alongside a little high country creek rushing vigorously to nowhere, the sixteen men assemble in a fairly tight grouping, take off their hats and shirts, and unhook their belts and holsters, letting their sidearms drop to the ground. All are natives of the rural Western states, successful ranchers and farmers in their fifties and sixties, some of them silver-haired now but still self-possessed and self-reliant. Their hearts are set to pounding by the ritu-

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alistic atmosphere which comes to prevail below the rim of this remote plateau in southeastern Utah, among this group of strangers. The late afternoon sun burns into their leathery faces as, one by one, the men kneel softly in the sand and *silently begin to pummel one another with their fists, lunging* as far as their reach allows while remaining upright.

By turning in all directions some can strike four or five of their neighbors, while others are able to hit only one. Tears of exertion and emotion pour down their faces as, after three hours, half-dead with fatigue and dripping blood and perspiration, the men lower their fists and embrace one another, weeping loud, harshly guttural cries, like lava and brimstone wrenched from the center of the earth.

Several more hours pass, filled with awkward embrace, during which the sun sets and an intense high country cold comes to replace it. The men are now chattering from dehydration, cold and hunger, the traces of their passions drying on bare backs until the strong winds pouring down from the plateau bring wild silvery dreams of pneumonia, fever and death.

They control themselves around midnight, knees swollen, stomachs knotted, mouths filled with dust and gravel. Staggering to their feet, shivering and numb, they locate holsters and belts, strap them to their waists, put on shirts and hats and, with their eyes, wordlessly bid eloquent goodbyes, each one eventually finding and taking the steep path he had arrived on some twelve hours earlier.

Meanwhile, above all this, in a loose circle stretching out for several miles along the canyon's lip, the late-model four-wheel-drive vehicles stand parked in readiness, engines running. Inside them sit the wives of the sixteen armed men, who at this very moment are working their way slowly up the various gullies and arroyos leading away from the canyon floor. Their prim, severely marcelled wives sit patiently in heated compartments, steam rising off open coffee containers as they wind plaid blankets closer around their knees, otherwise motionless in the front seats of jeeps and pickups and vans, calmly waiting.

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Back East

It is early Sunday morning. Three men, dressed in armed-forces green jumpsuits and scuffed black paratroop boots, form a slowly rotating triangle on the closely-packed dance floor of The Galaxy, a private club consisting of one cavernous room with the entire universe projected along its walls and ceiling, located on the twelfth floor of a lower Manhattan loft building.

Ira is a successful copywriter in an advertising agency, Jeff an ingenue actor, and Bruce a veteran Korean chef. They first met a little over a year ago and have been nearly inseparable since. Come Friday at about nine o'clock in the evening, Bruce, Jeff and Ira usually find themselves together until the following Sunday afternoon, and this weekend has been no exception. The varied permutations of three distinct personalities and physiques have served to entertain and give pleasure for two nights running: during visits to numerous clubs and bars they have caroused, laughed and made love. At The Galaxy since midnight, they will remain until it closes, sometime before eleven in the morning.

As the song, "Dancin' with Myself," booms through the vast hall the three men lose themselves in the push of the music, a sensation as invigorating as fording a swift and powerful river. In spite of the hour they feel freshly alive, the week's routines and irritations having long since been dispersed within deafening sound and the closeness of each other's company. Their thoughts repeatedly float off to the middle of nowhere. Disinterested, becalmed fantasies take place, unrelated to present surroundings and companions. Bruce, 41 years old, dreams of his childhood home, an isolated trading town in the stony, rain-soaked mountains of coastal South Korea; Jeff, 22, sees the mischievous, adolescent faces of his high school friends in Beverly, Iowa; and Ira, 29, gloats over memories of various strangers, Asian, African and European men, partners in casual affairs he has had during the summer vacations he looks forward to taking each year.

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Entwined within itself, arms draped over shoulders, this triad moves along the floor in a long, curving line, describing a path of sorts through countless dancing couples. Around it people mill and smile, argue and embrace. Faces and bodies leave their imprints on the attention of the three men like life forms encountered underwater, calling up a myriad of responses only to disappear, replaced by others. They have not slept since Thursday night but pills, dinners and shows, cocaine and liquor, have served to keep them enthusiastic, and by now they feel an immense euphoria, seemingly impervious to the passage of time and their own fatigue.

Seen from the railed-in balcony on the mezzanine above, Bruce, Jeff and Ira advance along a wide arc through the roiling crowd, as if tracing a small segment of the vast orbit of their lives. Far above their heads planets and constellations are projected, while periodically a velvety white moon rises, temporarily dimming the prickly light of the thousands of stars enfolding them. The path of companionship, their progress seems to be saying, is a long and curious one, along which they will rotate through the walls of The Galaxy, out into the streets, and onto the track of time itself. Dreaming alone while laced for support in the arms of their friends, the three men huddle together, eyes half-closed, distant smiles on their lips, as the couples immediately around them on the dance floor pause to take in this novel configuration, pondering its many possibilities, weighing the chances for its survival.

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James Fenton

Children in Exile

to J.T.L.&S.

"What I am is not important, whether I live or die—
    It is the same for me, the same for you.
What we do is important. This is what I have learnt.
    It is not what we are but what we do,"

Says a child in exile, one of a family
    Once happy in its size. Now there are four
Students of calamity, graduates of famine,
    Those whom geography condemns to war,

Who have settled here perforce in a strange country,
    Who are not even certain where they are.
They have learnt much. There is much more to learn.
    Each heart bears a diploma like a scar—

A red seal, always hot, always solid,
    Stamped with the figure of an overseer,
A lethal boy who has learnt to despatch with a mattock,
    Who rules a village with sharp leaves and fear.

From five years of punishment for an offence
    It took America five years to commit
These victim-children have been released on parole.
    They will remember all of it.

They have found out: it is hard to escape from Cambodia,
    Hard to escape the justice of Pol Pot,
When they are called to report in dreams to their tormentors.
    One night is merciful, the next is not.

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I hear a child moan in the next room and I see
The nightmare spread like rain across his face
And his limbs twitch in some vestigial combat
In some remembered place.

Oh let us not be condemned for what we are.
It is enough to account for what we do.
Save us from the judge who says: You are your father's son,
One of your father's crimes—your crime is you.

And save us too from a fatal geography
Where vengeance is impossible to halt.
And save Cambodia from threatened extinction.
Let not its history be made its fault.

They feared the woods, feared tigers, snakes and malaria.
They thought the landscape terrible and wild.
There were ghosts under the beds in the tower room.
A hooting owl foretold a still-born child.

And how would they survive the snows of Italy?
For the first weeks, impervious to relief,
They huddled in dark rooms and feared the open air,
Caught in the tight security of grief.

Fear attacked the skin and made the feet swell
Though they were bathed in tamarind at night.
Fear would descend like a swarm of flying ants.
It was impossible to fight.

I saw him once, doubled in pain, scratching his legs.
This was in Pisa at the Leaning Tower.
We climbed to the next floor and his attackers vanished
As fast as they had come. He thought some power

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Some influence lurked in certain rooms and corners.
But why was I not suffering as well?
He trod cautiously over the dead in the Campo Santo
And saw the fading punishments of Hell

And asked whether it is true that the unjust will be tormented
And whether those who suffer will be saved.
There are so many martyrdoms in the beautiful galleries.
He was a connoisseur among the graves.

It was the first warm day of the year. The university
Gossiped in friendly groups around the square.
He envied the students their marvellous education,
Greedy for school, frantic to be in there.

On the second train he was relaxed and excited.
For the first time he was returning home,
Pointing his pocket camera at the bright infinity of mountains.
The winter vines shimmered like chromosomes,

Meaningless to him. The vines grew. The sap returned.
The land became familiar and green.
The brave bird-life of Italy began planning families.
It was the season of the selfish gene.

Lovers in cars defied the mad gynaecologist.
In shady lanes, and later than they should,
They were watching the fireflies' brilliant use of the hyphen
And the long dash in the darkening wood.

And then they seemed to check the car's suspension
Or test the maximum back-axle load.
I love this valley, but I often wonder why
There's always one bend extra in the road.

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And what do the dogs defend behind the high wire fences?
What home needs fury on a running lead?
Why did the Prince require those yellow walls?
These private landscapes must be wealth indeed.

But you, I am glad to say, are not so fortified.
The land just peters out behind the house.
(Although, the first time the hunters came blazing through the garden,
Someone screamed at me: "Get out there. What are you, man or mouse?")

When Duschko went mad and ate all those chickens
It was a cry for help. Now he breaks loose
And visits his fellow guards, and laughs at their misery—
Unhappy dog! So sensitive to abuse.

He thought there was a quantum of love and attention
Which now he would be forced to share around
As first three Vietnamese and then four Cambodians
Trespassed on his ground.

It doesn't work like that. It never has done.
Love is accommodating. It makes space.
When they were requested to abandon their home in the hayloft,
Even the doves retired with better grace.

They had the tower still, with its commanding eyelets.
The tiles were fond of them, the sky grew kind.
They watched a new provider spreading corn on the zinc tray
And didn't mind.

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Boat people, foot people, wonky Yankee publishers—
They'd seen the lot. They knew who slept in which beds.
They swooped down to breakfast after a night on the tiles
And dropped a benediction on your heads.

And now the school bus comes honking through the valley
And education litters every room—
Grammars, vocabularies, the Khao-i-Dang hedge dictionary,
The future perfect, subjunctive moods and gloom.

So many questions in urgent need of answer:
What is a pope? What is a proper noun?
Where is Milan? Who won the Second World War?
How many fluid ounces in a pound?

La Normandie est renommée par ses falaises et ses fromages.
What are Normandy, cliffs, cheeses and fame?
Too many words on the look-out for too many meanings.
Too many syllables for the tongue to frame.

A tiny philosopher climbs onto my knee
And sinks his loving teeth into my arm.
He has had a good dream. A friendly gun-toting Jesus
Has spent the night protecting him from harm.

He goes for Technical Lego and significant distinctions.
Suppose, he says, I have a house and car,
Money and everything, I could lose it all
As we lost all our property in the war.

But if I have knowledge, if I know five languages,
If I have mathematics and the rest,
No one can steal that from me. The difference is:
No one inherits what I once possessed.

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When I die, my education dies with me.
I cannot leave my knowledge to my son,
Says this boy in exile, and he shrugs and laughs shortly.
Whoever dreamt of Jesus with a gun?

His brother dreams all night of broken chords
And all the summer long his broken hand,
Still calloused from hard labour, figures out a prelude.
Music and maths are what he understands.

These dreams are messages. One of the dead sisters
Says to the girl: "Do not be sad for me.
I am alive and in your twin sister's womb
In California, as you shall see."

Some time later, the postman brings a letter from America.
The child bride is expecting her first child.
Months afterwards, a photograph of a little girl.
Something is reconciled.

Alone in the tower room, the twin keeps up her dancing.
For the millionth time, Beethoven's *Für Elise*!
Little Vietnam borrows little Cambodia's toys.
Mother America is the appeaser.

Pretending to work, I retire to the study
And find a copy of *The Dyer's Hand*
Where I read: "An emigrant never knows what he wants,
Only what he does not want." I understand

What it is I have seen, how simple and how powerful
This flight, this negative ambition is
And how a girl in exile can gaze down into an olive grove
And wonder: "Is America like this?"

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For it is we, not they, who cannot forgive America,
And it is we who travel, they who flee,
We who may choose exile, they who are forced out,
Take to the hot roads, take to the sea,

In dangerous camps between facing armies,
The prey of pirates, raped, plundered or drowned,
In treacherous waters, in single file through the minefields,
Praying to stave off death till they are found,

Begging for sponsors, begging for a Third Country,
Begging America to take them in—
It is they, it is they who put everything in hazard.
What we do decides whether they sink or swim.

Do they know what they want? They know what they do not want.
Better the owl before dawn than the devil by day.
Better strange food than famine, hard speech than mad labour.
Better this quietness than that dismay.

Better ghosts under the bed than to sleep in the paddy.
Better this frost, this blizzard than that sky.
Better a concert pianist than a corpse, an engineer than a shadow.
Better to dance under the fresco than to die.

Better a new god with bleeding hands and feet,
Better the painted tortures of the blest
Than the sharp leaf at the throat, the raised mattock
And all the rest.

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My dear American friends, I can't say how much it means
to me
To see this little family unfurl,
To see them relax and learn, and learn about happiness,
The mother growing strong, the boys adept, the girl

Confident in your care. They can never forget the past.
Let them remember, but let them not fear.
Let them find their future is delightfully accomplished
And find perhaps America is here.

Let them come to the crest of the road when the morning
is fine
With Florence spread like honey on the plain,
Let them walk through the ghostless woods, let the guns
be silent,
The tiger never catch their eye again.

They are thriving I see. I hope they always thrive
Whether in Italy, England or France.
Let them dream as they wish to dream. Let them dream

Of Jesus, America, maths, Lego, music and dance.

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ZELDA: A Worksheet

Introductory Note

This selection of Zelda Fitzgerald's letters—the bulk published here for the first time—was originally put together as a kind of worksheet for a playwright preparing a drama based on Zelda's tragic life. The letters were put into this form by an actress, Lane Yorke, who longed to perform the role of Zelda on the stage. In Georgetown Mrs. Yorke met Scottie Fitzgerald Smith, the only child of Zelda and Scott, who gave her permission to research the Fitzgerald archives at the Firestone Library at Princeton. The Zelda letters, then a haphazard collection of some 1700 items kept in large cardboard boxes, were often difficult to decipher. Written on plain stationery, the letters had neither headings as to the locale of their origins, nor were they dated, except, occasionally, with a reference to the month. The punctuation was infrequent

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and inconsistent. The handwriting varied so greatly among the letters over their twenty-eight-year period that it seemed there were several different authors. Some examples of this variation are reproduced within the following text.

Mrs. Yorke first edited the letters as a guide for playwright Bill Luce, the author of The Belle of Amherst, *a Broadway-produced play about Emily Dickinson. Luce worked on the play about Zelda throughout 1979. In 1980, with Lane Yorke in the title role, the play, which was entitled* Zelda, *was performed for three weeks at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina. Lane Yorke was the star for an hour and forty minutes of what was essentially a single-role dramatization (a doctor put in a brief appearance).*

Mrs. Yorke has divided this worksheet into five sections—geographical locations where Zelda was at the time the letters were composed. She has also provided introductory notes for each section, and an epilogue. In the interest of readability, the following worksheet has been slightly altered and re-edited for magazine publication, although an effort has been made to preserve many of Zelda's original quirks of hyphenation and punctuation. Asterisks denote substantial editorial deletions and ellipses are used to indicate minor omissions. The letters are addressed to F. Scott Fitzgerald unless otherwise indicated.

Stills from a PBS video of Zelda, *starring Lane Yorke, taped at the Spoleto Festival, Charleston, 1980.*

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Montgomery, 1919

Zelda's letters in this section begin in the spring of 1919. She was nineteen. The war had ended, and Scott, discharged from the army, left his unit in Alabama for New York to find a job. Scott and Zelda's informal engagement was broken by Zelda, causing Scott to make three trips back to Montgomery in the following year to persuade Zelda to marry him. This Side of Paradise *was published in March of 1920. On Easter Sunday of 1920, Scott married Zelda in the rectory of St. Patrick's Cathedral.*

Mrs. Francesca—who never heard of you—got a message from Ouija for me. Nobody's hands were on it—but hers—and it told us to be married—that we were soul-mates. Theosophists think that two souls are incarnated together—not necessarily at the same time, but are mated—since the time when people were bisexual; so you see "soul-mate" isn't exactly snappy-stylish; after all: I can't get messages but it really worked for me last night—only it couldn't say anything, but "dead, dead"—so, of course I got scared and quit. It's really most remarkable, even if you do scoff. I wish you wouldn't, it's so easy, and believing is much more intelligent.

There's no Christmas in the air—and I'm so distressed because I have a tremendous fondness for streets lined with fireworks and holly strands—and loads of candles and big bundles. Nobody seems to care whether it's Christmas or Lincoln's birthday down here * * *

I hope I'll never get ambitious enough to try anything. It's so *much* nicer to be damned sure I *could* do it better than other

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people—and I might not if I tried. That of course would break my heart—* * *

* * * To-day seems like Easter and I wish we were together walking slow thru the sunshine and the crowds from Church. Everything smells so good and warm and your ring shines so white in the sun—like one of the church lilies with a little yellow dust on it. We ought to be together this Spring. It seems made for us to love in. You can't imagine what havoc the ring wrought—a whole dance was completely upset last night. Everybody thinks it's lovely—and I am so proud to be your girl—* * *

The Ohio troops have started a wild and heated correspondence with Montgomery damsels. From all I can gather, the whole 37th Division will be down in May. Then I guess the butterflies will flitter a trifle more. It seems dreadfully peculiar not to be worried over the prospects of the return of at least three or four fiancées. * * *

* * * Our fairy tale is almost ended, and we're going to marry and live happily ever after just like the princess in her tower who worried you so much—and made me so very cross by her constant recurrence. I'm so sorry for all the times I've been mean and hateful—for all the miserable moments I've caused you when we could have been so happy. You deserve so much—so very much— . . . And I *do* want to marry you—even if you do think I "dread" it. I wish you hadn't said that—I'm not afraid of anything. To be afraid a person has either to be a coward or very great and big. I am neither. Besides, I know you can take much better care of me than I can, and I'll always be very, very happy with you—except sometimes when we engage in our weekly debates—and even then I rather enjoy myself. I like being very calm and masterful, while you become emotional and sulky. I don't care whether you think so or not—I do. * * *

Darling, I nearly sat it off in the Strand today and all because T.E. Lawrence of the Movies is your physical counter-part. So

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I was informed by half a dozen girls before I could slam on a hat and see for myself. He made me so homesick. I thought at first waiting would grow easier later—but every day I need you more. All these soft, warm nights going to waste when I ought to be lying in your arms under the moon—the dearest arms in all the world—darling arms that I love so to feel around me. How much longer—before they'll be there to stay? * * *

* * * It's funny but I like being "pink and helpless." When I know I seem that way, I feel terribly competent—and superior. I keep thinking, "how those men think I'm purely decorative and they're just fools for not knowing better"—and I love being rather unfathomable. You are the only person on earth, Lover, who has ever known and loved all of me. Men love me cause I'm pretty—and they're always afraid of mental wickedness—and men love me cause I'm clever and they're always afraid of my prettiness. One or two have even loved me cause I'm loveable, and then, of course, I was acting. But you just *do*, darling—and I *do*—* * *

* * * I don't want you to see me growing old and ugly—I know you'll be a beautiful old man—romantic and dreamy—and I'll probably be most prosaic and wrinkled. We will just *have* to die when we're thirty. * * *

* * * It's awfully hard to do everything by a foot-ball schedule, but I've been making a frantic effort at it for the last month. Between the *games* and my *piano lessons*, I'll probably be a mere shadow of the girl I once was by the time you come—* * *

I'm just recovering from a wholesome amour with Auburn's "starting quarter-back" so my disposition is excellent as well as my health. Mentally, you'll find me dreadfully deteriorated. But you never seem to know when I was stupid or when I wasn't anyway.

Please bring me a quart of gin—I haven't had a drink all summer and you're already ruined along alcoholic lines with

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Mrs. Sayre. After you left, every corner the nigger started cleaning was occupied by a bottle (or bottles). Tootsie[1], of course, is largely responsible but it was just one of those incidents that just can't be explained. She thought you drank at least 12 qts. in two days—* * *

* * * I'm expending all my energy on gum—I've started a continuous chew again—your disapproval used to put me on the wagon, but now I've got the habit again—* * *

* * * Don't please accumulate a lot of furniture. Really, Scott, I'd just as soon live *anywhere*. Can't we find a bed ready-made? Someday, you know we'll want rugs and wicker furniture and a home—I'm terribly afraid I'll just be in the way now—I wish New York were a little tiny town. I haven't the remotest idea of what it's like—* * *

* * * The map of New York might just as well be . . . China—All I saw was the dot where we could live—I couldn't help wondering over the fact that two rooms and bath took up the same space as Washington Square and Statue of Liberty—Thank God I'm marrying you and not New York—* * *

* * * Tilde[2] informed me that I'd certainly do all my swimming in a bath-tub in New York—So please have a huge one, big enough for us both. * * *

I've spent to-day in the grave-yard . . . It's all washed and covered with weepy, watery blue flowers that might have grown from dead eyes—sticky to touch with a sickening odor. The boys wanted to get in to test my nerve to-night—I wanted to *feel* "William Wreford, 1864." Why should graves make people feel in vain? . . . Somehow I can't find anything hopeless in having lived— . . . and in an hundred years I think I shall like having young people speculate on whether my eyes were brown or blue— . . . Isn't it funny how, out of a row of confederate soldiers two or three will make you

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think of dead lovers and dead loves—. . . Old death is so beautiful—so very beautiful—we will die together—I know—Sweetheart—

* * * How can you think deliberately of life without me. If you should die—oh, Darling—darling Scott—it'd be like going blind . . . I'd have no purpose in life—just a pretty decoration. Don't you think I was made for you? I feel like you had me ordered, and I was delivered to you to be worn. I want you to wear me like a watch charm or a button hole bouquet. And then, when we're alone, I want to help—to know that you can't do anything without me—* * *

* * * Look at this communication from Mamma—all on account of a wine-stained dress—

> Zelda;
>
> If you have added whiskey to your tobacco you can subtract your mother . . . If you prefer the habits of a prostitute don't try to mix them with gentility. Oil and water do *not* mix.

—Darling heart—I won't drink *any* if you object. Sometimes I get so bored and sick for you. It helps then—and afterwards, I'm just more bored and sicker for you—and ashamed—
* * *

* * * I don't see how you can carry around as much love as I've given you—* * *

Zelda, second from left, en pointe, *year unknown.*

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New York-Long Island-France

There are no extant letters from Zelda to Scott during this nine-year period, as they were rarely apart.

Scott wrote in "My Lost City": "It was typical of our precarious position in New York that when our child was to be born we played safe and went home to St. Paul—it seemed inappropriate to bring a baby into all that glamour and loneliness."

Scottie was born on October 26, 1921, in St. Paul, Minnesota, while Scott and Zelda lived with his parents. The Beautiful and Damned *was published in March of 1922,* The Great Gatsby *in 1925. In France, their friendships with Ernest Hemingway and Sara and Gerald Murphy began. Zelda embarked on her ballet lessons with Madame Egorova.*

[TO MRS. CHARLES KALMAN:]

* * * Ring[3] is drinking himself to an embalmed state so he'll be all ready for the grim reaper. I don't think he'll have long to wait if he keeps on. His wife is worried sick. At Atlantic City, he was certainly the man about town at Evelyn Nesbit's cafe. She is attractive and she doesn't take dope any more. Isn't that sweet of her? * * *

[TO THE KALMANS:]

* * * We have been having a Hell of a time. Scott met me with a nurse which I promptly fired and since then I have had the baby myself. Now I have another one (nurse, not baby) who refuses to eat with my 14 kt. couple, and as a result we are in the wildest confusion. On top of all our domestic problems we have been gotten together with three times

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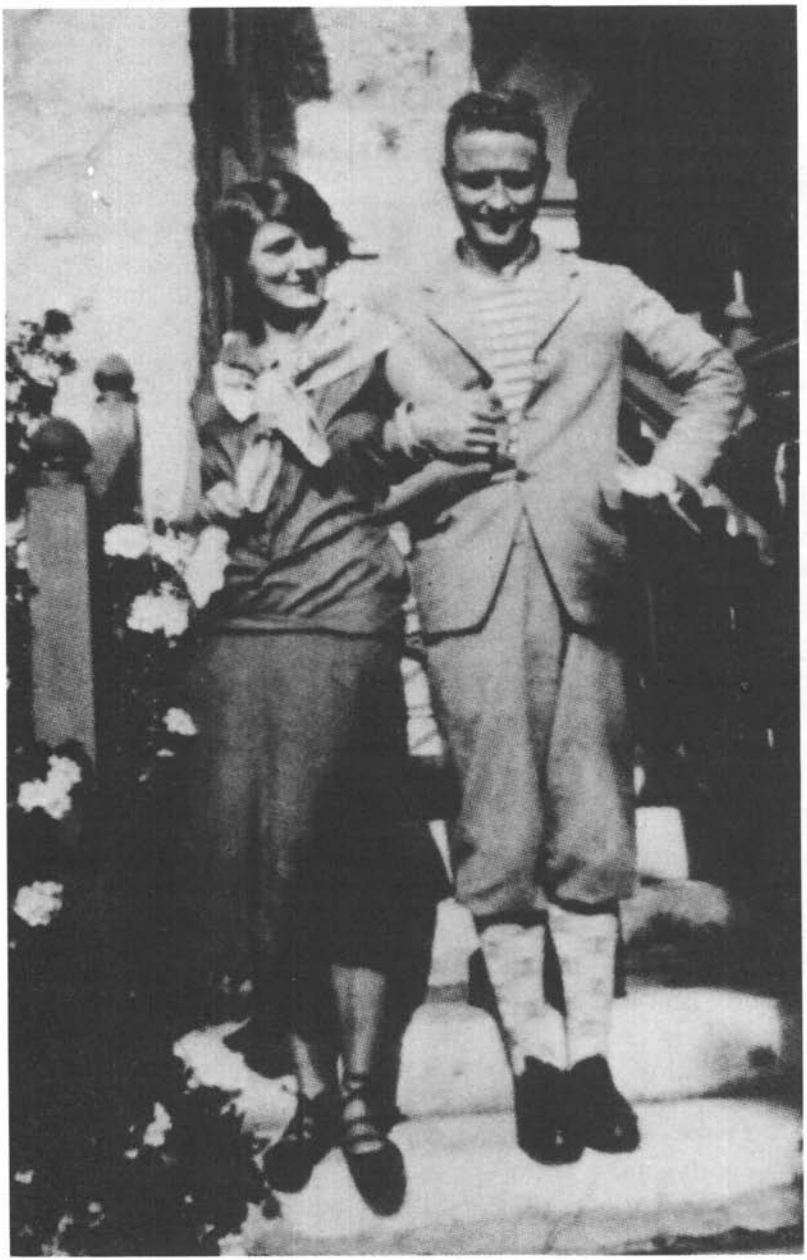

Zelda and Scott on the Riviera, 1926.

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by the Ring Lardners and various others. He is a typical newspaper man whom I didn't find very amusing. His wife is common but I like her. He is six feet tall and goes on periodical sprees lasting from one to X weeks. He is on one now, which *is probably the reason he calls on us. He plays the saxophone* and takes us to Mr. Gene Buck's House—Mr. Gene Buck originated Ziegfield's Follies and likes a house designed by Joseph Urban. It looks like a lot of old scenery glued together. Mr. Buck says "seen" where he should say "saw" and is probably a millionaire . . . I like Mr. Buck. He married a Dulcy-type chorus girl who has lovely legs and consequently a baby. * * *

[TO MRS. CHARLES KALMAN:]

* * * Great Neck has turned so hot lately that I have frequently suspected it of being what is known as "the after life" and now I am writing you in the interim of relief brought about by my own patent cooler. I'm going to sell the invention to Ed Wynn. It consists of: 3 parts gin, 1 part water and the juice of a lemon—without which life would be unbearable, quite. * * * Scott has started a new novel and retired into strict seclusion and celibacy. * * *

Great Neck is razzle-dazzling a hundred fold now that hot weather has arrived. All the pools and even the Sound reek of gin, whiskey and beer to say nothing of light wines. I am afraid we have moved to a place of very ill repute—but all's well with a sober man—and vice-versa. * * *

New York lay behind them. The forces that produced them lay behind them. That Alabama and David would never sense the beat of any other pulse half so exactly, since we can only recognize in other environments what we have grown familiar with in our own, played no part in their expectations.

"I could cry!" said David, "I want to get the band to play on the deck. It's the most thrilling God-damned thing in the

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world—all the experiences of man lie there to choose from!"

"Selection," said Alabama, "is the privilege for which we suffer in life."

"It's so magnificent! It's glorious! We can have wine with our lunch!"

—*Save Me the Waltz* (ZF)

[TO EDMUND WILSON:]

Dear Bunny,

* * * We met Dos's wife in Paris. I thought she was awfully pretty. She looks like a bust by Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney and I like the excited restraint in the voices of primitive women. * * * Americans are not in vogue anymore. We went to Gertrude Stein's where a young poet vomited from sheer emotion and the atmosphere was hazy and oracular. There was Michael Arlen several times. I liked him immensely, and his wife is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in Chanel beads, don't you think? Interspersed here and there, there are quantities of tall women with unpigmented eyes and no eye-brows, dark contributors to *The Dial* with special *boites-de-nuit*, the gray hair of Jeanette Flauner[4] * * *

After the swimming at Cannes was over and the year's octopi had grown up in the crevices of the rocks, we started back to Paris. The night of the stock-market crash we stayed at the Beau Rivage in St. Raphael in the room Ring Lardner had occupied another year. We got out as soon as we could because we had been there so many times before—it is sadder to find the past again and find it inadequate to the present than it is to have it elude you and remain forever a harmonious conception of memory.

"Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number—"*(ZF)*[5]

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Prangins

On June 5, 1930, Zelda was admitted to the Prangins Clinic in Nyon, outside Geneva. She entered as a private patient under the care of Dr. Oscar Forel, a noted Swiss psychiatrist. Dr. Forel and his clinic are believed to have served Scott as prototypes for characters and settings in Tender Is the Night.

Diagnosed as schizophrenic, Zelda was institutionalized at Prangins for fifteen months. Scott remained behind in Paris with Scottie and Mademoiselle, the nurse. As Zelda began to recover, he moved and lived for a few months in Geneva and then Lausanne to be closer to her.

* * * It's ghastly losing your mind and not being able to see clearly, literally or figuratively—and knowing that you can't think and that nothing is right, not even your comprehension of concrete things like how old you are or what you look like.

Where are all my things? I used to always have dozens of things and now there doesn't seem to be any clothes or anything personal in my trunk—I'd love the gramophone.

What a disgraceful mess—but if it stops our drinking it is worth it, because then you can finish your novel and write a play and we can live somewhere and can have a house with a room to paint and write like we had, with friends for Scottie and there will be Sundays and Mondays again which are different from each other and there will be Christmas and winter fires and pleasant things to think of when you're going to sleep—and my life won't lie up the back-stairs of music-halls and yours won't keep trailing down the gutters of Paris—if it will only work, and I can keep sane and not a bitter maniac—* * *

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SEND THE PHONOGRAPH *PLEASE* * * * I seem awfully queer to myself, but I know I used to have integrity even if it's gone now. You've got to come to me and tell me how I was. Now I see odd things: people's arms too long or their faces as if they were stuffed and they look tiny or far away, or suddenly out of proportion. * * *

* * * Every day it seems to me that things are more barren and sterile and hopeless. In Paris, before I realized that I was sick, there was a new significance to everything: stations and streets and façades of buildings—colors were infinite, part of the air, and not restricted by the lines that encompassed them and lines were free of the masses they held. There was music that beat behind my forehead and other music that fell into my stomach from a high parabola and there was some of Schumann that was still and tender and the sadness of the Chopin Mazurkas. Some of them sound as if he thought he couldn't compose them—and there was the madness of turning, turning, turning through the decisiveness of Liszt. Then the world became embryonic in Africa—and there was no need for communication. The Arabs fermenting in the vastness; the curious quality of their eyes and the smell of ants; a detachment as if I was on the other side of a black gauze—a fearless small feeling, and then the end at Easter[6]—but even that was better than the childish, vacillating shell that I am now. I am so afraid that when you come and find there is nothing left but disorder and vacuum that you will be horror-struck . . . I suppose it's because of draining myself so thoroughly, straining so completely every fibre in that futile attempt to achieve with every factor against me . . . You'll have to re-educate me—but you used to like giving me books and telling me things. I never realized before how hideously dependent on you I was. Dr. Forel says I won't be after. If I can have a clear intelligence I'm sure we can use it. I hope I will be different. * * *

* * * Thanks for the perfume. If you don't come take me out of this clinic I'm going crazy—swathed in embalming

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fluid all day and plastered at night with mud that decomposes and runs down my ears. I'd rather have hydro-phobia and all the plagues of the Holy Land and not be in captivity. There's so little variety in eczema—* * *

* * * It is a foul plague that I hope is on the wane—it runs and makes sores and fills up the cavities back of my eyes with fire and looks rather like those heads in your pictures of the war. Sheer putrification. * * * I am lonesome for you. Have you friends and other things for passing the summer? It seems queer; it has already passed—summers do and years and lives. * * *

* * * *Your letter astonished me: for a month and two* weeks I have been three times outside my room and for five months I have lived with my sole desire that of death. If you are coming here under the illusion that I am well, or even better, you will have to wait another year or so since I can see no possibility of escape from here.

Granted that in another six months, the Teutonic sophistries of Dr. Forel could render inactive the element in me which so many others have not found undesirable. * * *

I want to leave here. I have spent as much time as I intend to unable to step into a corridor alone . . . I do not consider it worthwhile, at my age, to pass any more time in a questionable attempt at remaking a figure that would always be hump-backed . . . In the meantime, it will be pleasant to see you again. I have missed you enormously.

Devotedly
Zelda

Dear Scott,

I have not the slightest indication of what your intentions are towards me. After five months of suffering and misery and isolation, at least the pathological side of my illness has disappeared. For the rest, I am a woman of thirty and, it seems to me, entitled to some voice in decisions concerning

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me. I have had enough and it is simply wasting my time and ruining my health keeping up the absurd pretense that a lesion in the head is curable. Will you make the necessary arrangements that I leave here and seek some satisfactory life for myself or shall I write to Daddy that he should come over? . . . I believe three months is the usual limit of these sorts of struggles and I have no intention of any longer internment. If you want an idea of what it's like, you might pass up your next tennis game. * * *

* * * Your letters are just non-committal phrases that you might write to Scottie and they do not help to unravel this infinite psychological mess that I'm floundering about in. I watch what attitude the nurse takes each day and then look up what symptom I have in Doctor Forel's book. Dear, why has my ignorance on a medical subject which has never appeared to me particularly interesting rendered me to the mental status of a child? * * *

I don't know how we're going to reverse time, you and me; erase and begin again—but I imagine it will be automatic. * * *

Dear Scott:

Your letter is not difficult to answer with promptitude since I have done nothing but turn over cause and effect in my mind for some time. Also *your* presentation of the situation is poetic, even if it has no bearing on the truth: your working to preserve the family and my getting away from it. If you so refer to giving your absolute minimum of effort both to your work and to our mutual welfare with no hope or plans for the future save the vague caprices which drive you from one place to another. I envy you the mental processes which can so distort conditions into a rectitude of attitude for you. You have always told me that I had no right to complain as long as I was materially cared for, so take whatever comfort you may find in whatever self-justification you can construct. . . . I am here, and since I have no choice, I will try to muster

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the grace to rest peacefully as I should, but our divergence is too great as you must realize for us ever to be anything except a hash to-gether and since we have neither found help or satisfaction in each other the best thing is to seek it separately. You might as well start whatever you start for a divorce immediately.

When you saw in Paris that I was sick, sinking—when you knew that I went for days without eating, incapable of supporting contact with even the servants—you sat in the bathroom and sang "Play in Your Own Backyard." Unfortunately, there wasn't any yard: it was a public play-ground apparently. You . . . belittled the few friends I knew whose eyes had gathered their softness at least from things that I understood . . . In listing your qualities I cannot find even one on which to base any possible relationship except your good looks, and there are dozens of people with that. The head waiter at the Plaza and my coiffeur in Paris—as you know, my memories are mostly lost in sound and smell, so there isn't even that, I'm sorry. * * *

* * * You say that you have been thinking of the past. The weeks since I haven't slept more than three or four hours; swathed in bandages sick and unable to read, so have I. There was:

The strangeness and excitement of New York, of reporters and furry smothered hotel lobbies; the brightness of the sun on the window panes and the prickly dust of late spring: the impressiveness of the Fowlers and much tea-dancing and my eccentric behavior at Princeton. There were Townsend's blue eyes and Ludlow's rubbers and a trunk that exuded sachet and the marshmallow odor of the Biltmore. There were always Ludlow and Townsend and Alex and Bill Mackey and you and me. We did not like women and we were happy. There was George's apartment and his absinthe cock-tails and Ruth Findley's gold hair in his comb and visits to the *Smart Set* and *Vanity Fair*—a collegiate literary world puffed into wide proportions by the New York papers. There were flowers and nightclubs and Ludlow's advice that moved us to

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the country. At West Point we quarrelled over morals once, walking beside a colonial wall under the freshness of lilacs. . . There was the road house where we bought gin . . . We swam in the depth of the night and went to John Williams's parties where there were actresses who spoke French when they were drunk. George played "Cuddle Up a Little Closer" on the piano. There were my white knickers that startled the Connecticut hills and the swim in the sandaled lady's bird-pool. The beach, and the dozens of men, mad rides along the Post Road to New York. We never could have a room at a hotel at night we looked so young, so once we filled an empty suitcase with one telephone directory and spoons and a pin-cushion at The Manhattan. I was romantically attached to Townsend and he went away to Tahiti— . . . We bought the Marmon with Harvey Firestone and went south through the haunted swamps of Virginia, the red clay hills of Georgia, the sweet rutted creek-bottoms of Alabama. We drank corn on the wings of an aeroplane in the moonlight and danced at the country-club and came back . . .

We moved to 59th Street. We quarrelled and you broke the bathroom door and hurt my eye. We went so much to the theatre that you took it off the income tax. We trailed through Central Park in the snow after a ball at the Plaza, I quarrelled with Zoë about Botticelli at the Brevoort and went with her to buy a coat for David Belasco. We had Bourbon and Deviled Ham and Christmas at the Overman's . . . And Mencken and our Valentine party . . . And I ice skated, and was pregnant and you wrote *The Beautiful and Damned*. We came to Europe and I was sick and complained always. There was London, and Wopping with Shane Leslie and strawberries as big as tomatoes at Lady Randolph Churchill's . . . There was Paris and the heat and the ice-cream that did not melt and buying clothes—and Rome and your friends from the British Embassy and your drinking, drinking. We came home. There was "Dog" and lunch at the St. Regis with Townsend and Alex and John: Alabama and the unbearable heat and our almost buying a house. Then we went to St. Paul and hundreds of people came to call. There were the

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Indian forests, and the moon on the sleeping porch and I was heavy and afraid of the storms. Then Scottie was born and we went to all of the Christmas parties and a man asked Sandy "who is your fat friend?" Snow covered everything. We had the Flu and went lots to the Kalmans and Scottie grew strong . . . We went to the Yacht Club and we both had minor flirtations . . . We came back to New York and rented a house when we were tight . . . Then I brought Scottie to New York. She was round and funny in a pink coat and bonnet and you met us at the station. In Great Neck there was always disorder and quarrels . . . We gave lots of parties: the biggest one for Rebecca West. We drank Bass Pale Ale and went always to the Bucks or the Lardners or the Swopes when they weren't at our house . . . We drank always and finally came to France because there were always too many people at the house . . . We went to St. Raphael. You wrote, and we went sometimes to Nice or Monte Carlo. We were alone and gave big parties for the French aviators. Then there was Josen[7] and you were justifiably angry. We went to Rome . . . The sheets were always damp. There was Christmas in the echoes, and eternal walks. We cried when we saw the Pope . . . Then I was horribly sick, from trying to have a baby and you didn't care much and when I was well we came back to Paris. We sat together in Marseilles and thought how good France was. We lived in the rue Tilsitt, in red plush and Teddy came for tea and we went to the market with the Murphys. There were the Wimans and Mary Hay and Eva Le Gallienne and rides in the Bois at dawn and the night we played puss-in-the-corner at the Ritz . . . We went to Antibes, and I was sick always . . . The Murphys were at the Hotel du Cap and we saw them constantly. Back in Paris I began dancing lessons because I had nothing to do. I was sick again at Christmas when the MacLeishes came and Doctor Gros said there was no use trying to save my ovaries . . . You were naturally more and more away. You found Ernest and the Cafe des Lilas and you were unhappy when Dr. Gros sent me to Salies-de-Bearn . . . We went to Cannes and listened to Raquel Miller and dined under the rain of fire-works. You couldn't work because your

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room was damp and you quarrelled with the Murphys. We moved to a bigger villa and I went to Paris and had my appendix out. You drank all the time and some man called up the hospital about a row you had had. We went home, and I wanted you to swim with me at Juan-les-Pins but you liked it better where it was gayer: at the Garoupe with Maurice Hamilton and the Murphys and the MacLeishes. Then you found Grace Moore and Ruth and Charlie and the summer passed, one party after another. We quarrelled about Dwight Wiman and you left me lots alone. There were too many people and too many things to do: every-day there was something and our house was always full. There was Gerald and Ernest and you often did not come home . . . I swam with Scottie except when I followed you, mostly unwillingly. Then I had asthma and almost died in Genoa. And we were back in America—further apart than ever before. In California, though you would not allow me to go anywhere without you, you yourself engaged in flagrantly sentimental relations with a child. You said you wanted nothing more from me all your life . . . We came east: I worked over Ellerslie incessantly and made it function. There was our first house party and you and Lois—and when there was nothing more to do on the house I began dancing lessons. You did not like it when you saw it made me happy. You were angry about rehearsals and insistent about trains . . . I think the most humiliating and bestial thing that ever happened to me in my life is a scene that you probably don't remember even in Genoa. We lived in the rue Vaugirard. You were constantly drunk. You didn't work and were dragged home at night by taxi-drivers when you came home at all. You said it was my fault for dancing all day. What was I to do? You got up for lunch. You made no advances towards me and complained that I was un-responsive. You were literally eternally drunk the whole summer. I got so I couldn't sleep and I had asthma again. You were angry when I wouldn't go with you to Montmartre. You brought drunken under-graduates in to meals when you came home for them, and it made you angry that I didn't care any more. I began to like Egorova. On the

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boat going back I told you I was afraid that there was something abnormal in the relationship and you laughed . . . I began to work harder at dancing—I thought of nothing else but that. You were far away by then and I was alone. We came back to rue Palatine and you, in a drunken stupor told me a lot of things that I only half understood: but I understood . . . You left me more and more alone, and though you complained that it was the apartment or the servants or me, you know the real reason you couldn't work was because you were always out half the night and you were sick and drank constantly. We went to Cannes. I kept up my dancing lessions and we quarrelled. You wouldn't let me fire the nurse that both Scottie and I hated. You disgraced yourself at the Barry's party, on the yacht at Monte Carlo, at the Casino with Gerald and Dotty. Many nights you didn't come home. You came into my room once the whole summer, but I didn't care because I went to the beach in the morning, I had my lessons in the afternoon, and I walked at night . . . We came back to Paris. You were miserable about your lung, and because you had wasted the summer, but you didn't stop drinking. I worked all the time and I became dependent on Egorova. I couldn't walk in the street unless I had been to my lesson. I couldn't manage the apartment because I couldn't speak to the servants. I couldn't go into the store to buy clothes and my emotions became blindly involved . . . I had to work because I couldn't exist in the world without it, and I still didn't understand what I was doing. I didn't even know what I wanted. Then we went to Africa and when we came back I began to realize because I could feel what was happening in others. You did not want me. Twice you left my bed saying "I can't. Don't you understand?"—I didn't . . . I just kept on going . . . And then the end happened. I went to Malmaison. You wouldn't help me—I don't blame you by now, but if you had explained I would have understood because all I wanted was to go on working. You had other things: drink and tennis, and we did not care about each other. You hated me for asking you not to drink. A girl came to work with me but I didn't want her to. I still believed in

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love and thought suddenly of Scottie and that you supported me. So at Valmont[8] I was in torture, and my head closed together. You gave me a flower and said it was "*plus petite et moins entendue*"—We were friends—Then you took it away and I grew sicker, and there was nobody to teach me, so here I am, after five months of misery and agony and desperation . . . Now that I can't sleep anymore I have lots to think about, and since I have gone so far alone I suppose I can go the rest of the way—but if it were Scottie I would not ask that she go through the same hell and if I were God I could not justify or find a reason for imposing it—except that it was wrong, of course, to love my teacher when I should have loved you. But I didn't have you to love—not since long before I loved her. * * *

* * * I have been reading Joyce and find it a nightmare in my present condition, and since my head evaporates in a book-store it would be much easier if you would send something to me—*not* in French since I have enough difficulty with English for the moment and *not* Lawrence and *not* Virginia Woolf or anybody who writes by dipping the broken threads of their heads into the ink of literary history, please—

Dear Scott:

* * * If you could write to Egorova a friendly impersonal note to find out exactly where I stand as a dancer it would be of the greatest help to me. Remember, this is in no way at all her fault. I would have liked to dance in New York this fall but where am I going to find again these months that dribble into the beets of the clinic garden? . . . My legs are already flabby and I will soon be like Ada MacLeish, huntress of coralled game * * * Why can't you write me what you think and want instead of vague attempts at reassurance? . . . You have always had so much sympathy for people forced to start over late in life that I should think that you could find the generosity to help me amongst your many others—not as you would a child but as an equal.

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I want you to let me leave here. You're wasting time and effort and money to take away the little we both have left. If you think you are preparing me for a return to Alabama you are mistaken, and also if you think that I am going to spend the rest of my life roaming from one sanitorium to another you are wrong. Two sick horses might conceivably pull a heavier load than a well one alone. Of course, if you prefer that I should spend six months of my life under prevailing conditions—my eyes are open and I will get something from that too, I suppose, but they are tired and unhappy and my head aches always . . . Every day it gets harder to think or live and I do not understand the object of wasting the dregs of me here, alone in a devastating bitterness.

* * * The panic seems to have settled into a persistent gloom punctured by moments of bombastic hysteria, which is, I suppose, a relatively wholesome state. * * * I am waiting impatiently for when you can come to see me if you will. Do you still smell of pencils and sometimes of tweed? * * * I wonder why we have never been very happy and why all this has happened. It was much nicer a long time ago when we had each other and the space about the world was warm. Can't we get it back some way—even by imagining? Sometimes, it's desperate to be so alone—and you can't be very happy in a hotel room. We were awfully used to having each other about. Dr. Forel told me to ask you if you had stopped drinking—so I ask—

My dearest and most precious Monsieur,

We have here a kind of maniac who seems to have been inspired with erotic aberrations on your behalf. Apart from that she is a person of excellent character, willing to work, would accept a nominal salary while learning, fair complexion, green eyes, would like correspondence with refined young man of your description with intent to marry. Previous experience unnecessary. Very fond of family life and a

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wonderful pet to have in the home. Marked behind the left ear with a slight tendency to schizophrenia.

We thought it best to warn you that said patient is one of the best we have at present in the irresponsible class, and we would not like any harm to come to her. She seems to be suffering largely from a grand passion, and is easily identifiable as she will be wearing the pink of condition and babbling about 6.04 being cupid's arrow—We hope this specimen will give entire satisfaction, that you will entrust us with all future orders and we love you with all all all our hearts and souls and body. * * *

Dearest, my Love—

Your dear face shining in the station, your dear radiant face and all along the way shimmering above the lake—
* * *

Please don't be depressed: nothing is sad about you except your sadness and the frayed places on your pink kimono and that you care so much about everything. * * * I love you so—and I want you to be happy. Can't you possibly be just a little bit glad that we are alive and that all the year that's coming we can be to-gether and work and love and get some peace for all the things we've paid so much for learning? Stop looking for solace: there isn't any, and if there were life would be a baby affair: Johnny takes his medicine and Johnny gets well and a quarter besides.

* * * Stop thinking about our marriage and your work and human relations—you are not a showman arranging an exhibit, you are a sun-god with a wife who loves him * * *

It's so happy to touch you.

Darling, Berne is such a funny town: we bumped into Hansel and Gretel and the Babes in the Wood were just under the big clock. It must be a haven for all lost things, painted on itself that way. Germanic legends slide over these red, peeling roofs like a fantastic shower and the ends of all stories probably lie in the crevasses. We climbed the cathedral tower

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in whispers, and there it was hidden in the valley, paved with sugar blocks, the house of good witches, and I ask of all the painted statues three wishes

That you should love me

That you love me

You love me!

O can you? I love you so.

The train rode home through a beautiful word: "alpinglun." The mountains had covered their necks in pink tulle like coquettish old ladies covering scars and wrinkles . . .

When we got home they said you had 'phoned so I 'phoned back as indiscreetly as possible since I couldn't bear not having heard your voice, that lovely warm feeling like an emotional massage. * * *

* * * Scottie was darling. I love her thin child's legs and her suspended-motion way of walking. She is not a bit boyish—most children are at her age. We had a picnic under a tree growing out of the horizon with the road falling away. * * * She is a dear girl close to my heart—so close.

If you think you would get any pleasure from a visit, do come Saturday—you have only to let me know. I am always waiting for you and there's always my infinite love—. . . I love you as I love my vanished youth—which is as much as a human heart can hold—* * *

Goofy, my darling, hasn't it been a lovely day? I woke up this morning and the sun was lying like a birthday parcel on my table so I opened it up and so many happy things went fluttering into the air: * * * the remembered feel of our skins cool against each other in the mornings like a schoolmistress. And you 'phoned and said I had written something that pleased you and I don't believe I've ever been so heavy with happiness. * * * The horizon lies over the road to Lausanne and the succulent fields like a guillotine and the moon bleeds over the water and you are not so far away that I can't smell your hair in the drying breeze. * * * I

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walked on those telephone wires for two hours after holding your love like a parasol to balance me. * * *

I'm so glad you finished your story. Please let me read it Friday. And I will be very sad if we have to have two rooms. Please. * * *

* * * I've made Scottie some wonderful paperdolls, you and me and her, but they have no clothes yet. I had such fun imagining you while I drew: I remember every single spot of light that ever gouged a shadow beside your bones so you were easy to make—and I gave you some very doggy green socks to match your eyes * * *

Dearest, my Darling—

Living is cold and technical without you, a death mask of itself.

At seven o'clock I had a bath but you were not in the next room to make it a *baptisme* of all I was thinking.

At eight o'clock I went to gymnastics but you were not there to turn moving into a harvesting of breezes—

At nine o'clock I went to the *tissage* and an old man in a white stock chanted incantations but you were not there to make his imploring voice seem religious.

At noon I played bridge and watched Dr. Forel's profile dissecting the sky, *contre jour*—

All afternoon I've been writing soggy words in the rain and feeling dark inside, and thinking of you. When a person crosses your high forehead and slides down into the pleasant valleys about your dear mouth it's like Hannibal crossing the Alps * * *

And you are a darling and it must be awful to have a person always trying to creep inside you the way I do—

Good-night, my Sweet
Love
Zelda

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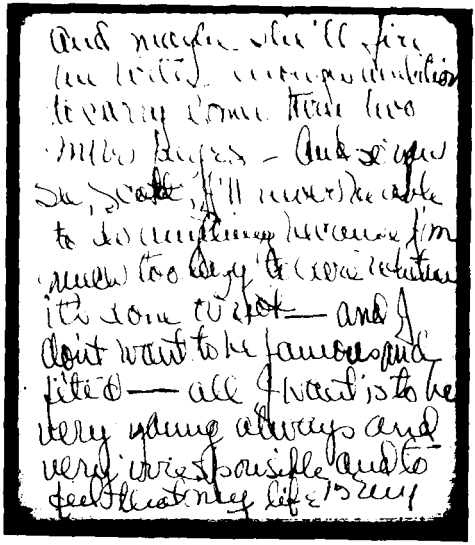

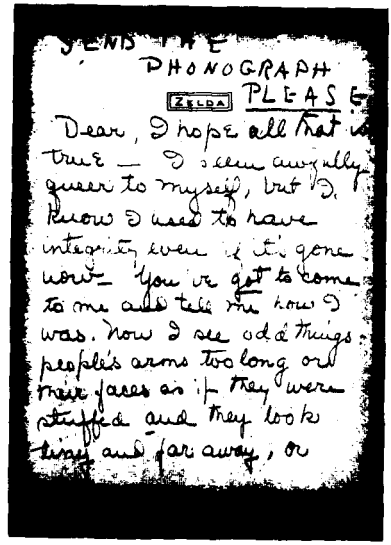

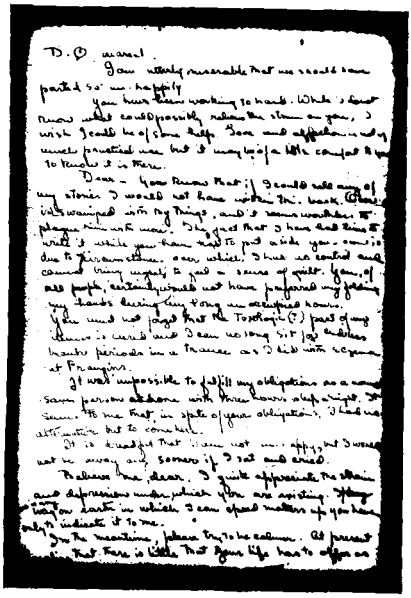

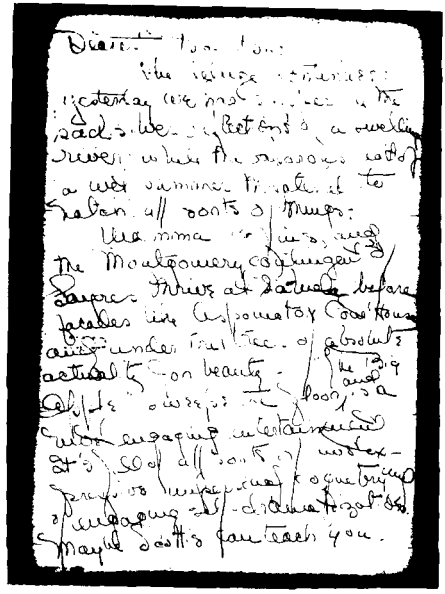

Four examples of the startling differences in Zelda Fitzgerald's handwriting.

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* * * I went to Geneva all by myself with a fellow maniac and the city was thick and heavy before the rain . . . and I wanted so to be in Lausanne with you. * * * Have you ever been so lonely that you felt eternally guilty—as if you'd left off part of your clothes—* * * In middle life, when one ought to be solid and content, one has bored so many vistas thru to unhappiness, sickness and collapsibility that all our energy is spent turning our eyes away—

* * * Was it fun in Paris? Who did you see there and was the Madeleine pink at five o'clock and did the fountains fall . . . in the Place de la Concorde and did the blue creep out from behind the colonnades of the rue de Rivoli through the grill of the Tuileries and was the Louvre gray and metallic in the sun and did the trees hang growing over the cafes and were there lights at night and the click of saucers and the autohorns that play Debussy—

I *love* Paris. How was it?

* * * Ages have passed since your last visit and conditions do not seem to improve any with time. I have quite lost my mind and roam all over the place in a half daze that is exceedingly unpleasant to bear. The total result being that I think if you can collaborate with Doctor Forel on some scheme by which I would be free to be with Scottie at least a week during the holidays the clouds might clear themselves away for a little while at any rate. Its most depressing being closed in what appears to be a semi-insane asylum since what will soon be a year's time now. Of course I realize that you have done all in your power to help me and of that I am exceedingly grateful, but you must try to understand how dreary and drastic is my present position—far away from all my friends and my family across the Atlantic and alone in a strange part of Switzerland with hardly a soul to speak English with. It's heart-rendering and some times I feel like crying when I really get down to thinking it over—which is rarely—but I suppose introspection isn't good for a person in

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as highly nervous state as I am.

Anyway, think it over—maybe I would do better and make more progress in another climate—

Devotedly
Zelda

Montgomery, 1931

In September of 1931, Zelda was released from Prangins and sailed immediately on the Aquitania *with Scott and Scottie for America and home in Alabama.*

Zelda wrote this section of letters over a five-month period from a rented home near her parents, in Montgomery. Scott, under contract to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, was living alone in Hollywood.

Darling, my love—

* * * It keeps on raining and the sky is filled with copper clouds like the after-math of cannon-fire, pre-war, civil-war clouds and I feel all empty and bored and very much in love with you, my dear one, my own. I wish you were here so we could stretch our legs down beside one another and feel all warm and hidden in the bed, like seeds beaten into the earth. * * *

* * * I can't write. I tried all afternoon—and I just twisted the pencil round and round churning between my teeth, and I love you. You are a darling. When you can't write you sit on bed and look so woe-begone like a person

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who's gotten to a store and can't remember what they wanted to buy.

Good-night, dear. If you were in my bed it might be the back of your head I was touching where the hair is short and mossy or it might be up in the front where it makes little caves above your forehead, but wherever it was it would be the sweetest place, the sweetest place—* * *

* * * Deo! I *must* have a parrot! Can't you bring me one for Christmas. Hers [Julia's] says "Aw go to hell" . . . *Please*, Deo, bring one to me. There aren't any here and I must have one. You could keep him in the bath-room on the way out * * *

* * * D.O. If you will come back I will make the jasmine bloom and all the trees come out in flower and we will eat clouds for dessert and bathe in the foam of the rain—and I will let you play with my pistol and you can win every golf game and I will make you a new suit from a blue hydrangea bush and shoes from pecan-shells . . . But if you write me about Lily Dalmita and Constance[9] I will go off to Florida for a week and spend our money and make you jealous of my Legs A La Creole when you get home. * * *

Your wife Zelda—

* * * We have a white and gracious spectre in furry boots who waves his tail fanfare-ily. His eyes are topaz and the head of a honey-well and his name is Chopin. Maybe you'd better not bring a parrot since he has already tried to eat Julia's. * * *

Darling, my Dearest:

The air blows warm and soft as the swirl of a painter's brush . . . There is a frustrated melancholy floating on the wind in stagnant spirals and it feels like the nights in *This Side of Paradise*. * * *

I have finished my one-act play and got all the rest of my

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The Fitzgeralds returning to America on board the Aquitania, *1931.*

things off to Ober so there's no excuse for not working, unfortunately. * * * Mlle. is really a very nice person to have about and Scottie is—well, everything but you. * * *

We rode to Pickett Springs and there is a lovely house where old head-quarters used to be[10] and a big cotton gin on the site of your tent. It was very nostalgic. At the Fair Grounds a lone elephant takes his winter siesta and three lions shake the moths from their manes. It's such a bizarre way of existence under half-shelter out in the picked cotton fields with the evening sky running red lava down the dirt roads as if they were all about to be buried under a furious glory.

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My foot is a considerable nuisance. Since I can't get much exercise I sleep lightly and last night I had a calvacade of police-men out here at three o'clock to scare the cat off your tin roof but it was not schizophrenic, however * * * Every five minutes I want to send you a brilliant telegram to make you Darling-Conscious but I never can think of anything except that I love you—and you must be rather used to that by now—* * *

Dearest My D.O.—

Sunday in a trance and sleeping all afternoon like a deserted cat on your bed and now it's night and the house seems to be nothing but over-tones with you away. Tho your hat is in the hall and your stick still on the bed and you could not tell that it's all just a bluff and a make-shift without you. * * *

* * * *Private Lives* made me laugh so immoderately loud that I am afraid echoes spattered the Eglantine—and *Sanctuary* is sheer horror! It's so wonderful to be able to read again after two years of not being able to concentrate. The fertility of books—and the dark, stark places, terror, of a human mind straying. Now I am so frightened of the past that I am half afraid to think. There is so much conditioning to be done—* * *

* * * I worked on the automobile story, changed the name to "Sweet Chariot" and sent it off. Also "Elsa Maxwell" which, in spite of your criticism still seems good to me. The thought of calling it "Foie Gras"—what do you think? The plot is banal, but the writing is the best I ever did—

* * * It's cold here and these celibate skies are depressing. There is a flat incurious frigidity in the wind and it roams about like an exile petulantly storming the dead woods and bushes.

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I lost Scottie in a store for half-an-hour and it was ghastly, like being whirled through endless rotating hypotheses of life and being in some chaotic functioning of the consciousness without the mind. It was because I let her shop alone . . . She is such a darling and so full of Christmas and excitement. You will roar when you see her on the pony rearing back against the land-scape followed by a little boy just her size and black as the ace of spades. It's cute, like nice things that don't happen any more. * * *
* * * Now we have only thirty-eight til you'll be home again. We are like a lot of minor characters at table waiting for the entrance of the star . . . I keep the light burning on your desk so I'll think you're there when I wake up, but then it's awful to have to turn it out when it's day. * * *

* * *. Daddy is sinking rapidly the Doctors say. I only go once a day and take Mamma for a long drive since he is completely unconscious and does not know us or seem to want anybody about.

* * * Daddy seemed so elegant and concise. I have never seen anything so beautiful. The Capitol flag is flying at half-mast and old gray-headed men seemed terribly sad. But Daddy seems young and beautiful and somehow master of every thing. He looks very little in his clothes. * * *

* * * The poignancy of human effort, the things people live for are so heart breaking when death reduces the span of life, materialistically, to a gold watch and an extra pair of pants: or maybe not even that. * * *

* * * Mamma and I drove to a pottery in the hills to get some vases for the cemetery and I bought a lump of clay to mould. It is very fascinating. You feel like a plastic surgeon and the things are very rubbery and alive. It is really fine to cup my hands about a head, and stick my thumbs into the eyes and mash the neck as if it were my own I were rectify-

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ing. * * *

I love a Sunday in Montgomery with all the people on their porches and the cars all full of children . . . This is a pleasant place. I am sorry I find difficulty in simplicity, *but* I would be happy if you were here.

$75,000! Goofo—I would do anything for that! We could build us a house with the surplus. A great denuded square I want with frank windows that frame the world in cold impersonal rigidity. And it is to be all over yellow. We will have all the children we can and call them Dementia Praecox Fitzgerald—* * *

* * * This still Thanksgiving afternoon fanned with the leaves of school-books and muffled with echoes is very reminiscent. It makes me remember all the times we've been together absolutely alone in some suspended hour, a holiday from time * * * The big table at Mamma's has somehow lost direction without Daddy. My story limps homeward, 1,000 words to a gallon of coffee * * * It's fun thinking of Christmas and the night you will get home and how you'll look as you come out the gate . . . I will be very happy that you are so handsome and when I see how handsome you are my stomach will fall with many unpleasant emotions like a cake with too many raisins and I will want to shut you up in a closet like a dress too beautiful to wear * * *

I love you
Zelda

* * * The fire burns contentedly * * * I have a sore throat, asthma, grippe and indigestion and I am making Mamma a picture of myself for Christmas that looks like a Florentine fish-monger. * * * The house is fresh as a candy-store. The curtains are washed and starched to paper and the rugs are cleaned and bright, owing to hap-hazard animal excretions. We have had a zoo here since you left and its only Mamma who kept me from buying a monkey from the circus.

I love climbing out on the tin roof and brandishing my

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empty pistol and yelling "Who's there?" as if I had a mob at bay. But I am secretly, always the escaping criminal. * * * Minor tried to teach Scottie the "break-down." It's terribly hard since it consists of dangling yourself by your shoulders while your feet bounce like drum-sticks. It's the real nigger tap dancing and I'm crazy to have her learn it. It has nothing in common with musical comedy and is very distinguished and would be nice to know when calling on the President.

I miss my Daddy horribly. I am losing my identity here without men. I would not live two weeks again where there are none, since the first thing that goes is concision, and they give you something to butt your vitality against so it isn't scattered all over the air like sprays of dynamite. *D.O.* Darling, I love you—

Zelda, the dowager duchess of detriment.

* * * This place is like one of those cracked phonograph records that plays always in the same place where you have to push the needle over but each revolution it sticks 'til you push it again and you never can come to the tune. Save me, Deo, from the darkness and the blight. God! I will be glad when you get home two weeks from today. * * *

I am drugged by the atmosphere here. It's a shock moving about as we do—or is it growing old—suddenly finding yourself on unremembered corners surrounded by a flood of forgotten associations. * * *

* * * I am going to read *Red-Headed Woman*[11]. *I* want to write like you some day. I wish she hadn't done it well. My Darling—I want to do everything like you—
* * *

Think of me in the mists, and lights like white roses and don't forget me in that permeation of impermanence—

I love you so—

"Home to Babylon"[12] is a fine and moving story.

The cat has disappeared, lost himself in Indian summer somewhere under the fallen leaves. * * *

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* * * I went to get my hair washed this afternoon, shades of Hollywood Boulevard, and in walked, Les, the hairdresser's sister, straight from Los Angeles and fried to the eyes . . . Hearing her talk was like being two people at once, one of them dim and far away in the past. Equivalent spectres floated thru so many of our early years. * * *

O dear, this beneficent weather—and a pink rose in the garden and the cat rolling a sunbeam over the grass and the nights fall like a child's prayer . . . Do you think of me out there amongst the vibrations where everything quivers and waits to fall like swelling drops from a dropper?

And Daddy's grave so sad on the side of an old sinking hill. * * *

Baltimore

Zelda's second breakdown occurred in February, 1932. She was admitted to Phipps Psychiatric Clinic, an affiliate of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. It was here that she completed the first draft of her novel, Save Me the Waltz.

Scott rented "La Paix" in the suburbs of Baltimore where he brought Scottie to be near her mother. Zelda was able to join her family at "La Paix" for six months.

Her novel appeared just before her third breakdown in January, 1934, at which time she entered Sheppard-Pratt Hospital in Baltimore.

Zelda took up painting seriously while at Johns Hopkins, and her work was exhibited at a one-woman show in New York in the spring of 1934.

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Dearest:

Do go into my room. Then it would be nicer when I get back. I've always tried to make you use things first and get into strange beds before me because any place you've been is a good place and anything you've touched is desirable. * * *

If Trouble[13] bites, just rub his nose in it and give him a lump of sugar and recite the book of Esther to him. He will soon subside—. . . Mademoiselle will try out her nursery military tactics on the poor beast until I would not blame him if he bit her in two. She'd probably taste like possum anyway.

I love Baltimore. The shops are very sophisticated and there is amusement without end. If you were here, we could amuse ourselves without bothering about cures.

The money arrived—for which I thank you. I am getting an obsession about money. I don't feel that I have a right to buy anything; it's so tragic to see respectable middle-aged men with clerical faces and independent expressions selling candy and apples. * * *

* * * I have done some good writing but it goes slow since I have only 2 hours a day in which to collect my agenda, organize it and get it down. The rest of the time is very pleasant—gymnasium and excursions into Baltimorean superficialities * * *

The four hours at night—Well, there is a girl who screams "Murder in the first degree!" when she isn't screaming "Oi! Yoi! Yoi! The Mistletoe." I suppose there's nothing to do about it—I prefer it to the obnoxious reassurances of Mlle. B. and the nocturnal visitations of eczema.

I am reading Ian Gordon's *Modern French Painters*. He speaks of the sense of growing things in Van Gogh's work. Those crawling flowers and venomous vindictive blossoms are the hallucinations of a mad-man without organization or rhythm but with the power to sting and strangle certain submarine flora. I loved them at Prangins. They reassured me. * * * I suppose I will spend the rest of my life torn between the desire to master life and a feeling that it is, *au*

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fond, a contemptuous enemy. If there weren't you and Scottie, melancholia is about as happy a state as any other, I suppose. There's a woman here who wanders tentatively about the halls like the ghost in a poor detective story. It is impossible to feel sorry for crazy people since their realities do not coincide with our normal conceptions of tragedy. And yet, this woman's brother came to pay a visit. I thought how awful and poignant—that boney casket full of nothing that the man had ever loved and he was saying that he wanted her to come home again. It made me feel very sorry. I presume he was addressing his past. * * *

Anyway, there's nothing so sordid as being shut up. When man is no longer his own master, custodian of his own silly vanities and childish contentments, he's nothing at all—
* * *

* * * When are you coming to Baltimore? There is a night-club and some good shows. I have had a terrible proclivity towards the baubles and tawdry do-dads of life recently—feeling like the ex-wife of Diamond Jim Brady, mentally.
* * *

Darling—I miss you so. It's very interesting here, however. Every now and then somebody opens the door and I say "And what do you see, my sister" and they answer "Nothing but the dust up on the hills," and I go back to wishing I had never stolen the golden key and awaiting the return of Blue-Beard. * * *

The days wheeze in on these creaky March days like the last moments of a dying novelist. Sometimes I feel like a Titan and sometimes like a three-months abortion. But always I love you in spite of the fact that you are infinitely superior to me and I forgive you your many superlative merits.

Dear—I do not want to keep Mlle. It is very irritating to have a person in such close contact whom you feel is not co-operating except by giving in to avoid trouble. Scottie is not fond of her, so I have no regrets. * * * I cannot live anymore with people under thirty—harmoniously. They have too much to learn from experiences which I have already

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achieved. And do not care to be reminded of or have to explain to others—*chacun à son gout*! Love and Love and Love—

Zelda

* * * Yesterday Mrs. Kellam and I dug a few holes in some golf balls and I almost uprooted a gigantic oak with what used to be a chip-shot. Next week the course opens and we will get in some practice of some sort even if we have to use lacrosse nets.

Also we play bridge. You know how I play. I sit and wait for Divine Guidance to show me the difference between a finesse and a bluff. Then when I make a mistake I pretend I was thinking of something else. * * *

* * * About my book: you and the doctors agreed that I might work on it. If you now prefer that I put it aside for the present I wish you would be clear about saying so. The short story is a form demanding too concentrated an effort for me at present . . . *Please say what you want done*, as I really do not know. As you know my work is mostly a pleasure for me but if it is better for me to take up something quite foreign to my temperament, I will, though I can't see what good it does to knit bags when you want to paint pansies—
* * *

* * *
Dearest:

Dr. Squires tells me you are hurt that I did not send my book to you before I mailed it to Max.[14] Purposely I didn't—knowing that you were working on your own and honestly feeling that I had no right to interrupt you to ask for a serious opinion. Also, I know Max will not want it and I prefer to do the corrections after having his opinion. Naturally, I was in my usual rush to get it off my hands. You know how I hate brooding over things once they are finished: so I mailed it post-haste, hoping to have yours and Scribner's criticisms to

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use for revising.[15]

Scott, I love you more than anything on earth and if you were offended I am miserable. We have always shared everything but it seems to me I no longer have the right to inflict every desire and necessity of mine on you. I was also afraid we might have touched the same material.[16] Also, feeling it to be a dubious production due to my own instability I did not want a scathing criticism such as you have mercilessly—if for my own good—given my last stories, poor things. I have had enough discouragement, generally, and could scream with that sense of inertia that hovers over my life and everything I do. * * *

Dearest:

Of course, I gladly submit to anything you want about the book or anything else . . . Shall I wire Max to send it back? . . . I regret that it offended you. The Pershing incident which you accuse me of stealing occupies just one line and will not be missed. I willingly relinquish it. However, I would like you to thoroughly understand that my revision will be made on an aesthetic basis: that the other[17] material which I will elect is nevertheless legitimate stuff which has cost me a pretty emotional penny to amass and which I intend to use when I can get the tranquillity of spirit necessary to write the story of myself versus myself . . . I quite realize that the quality of this book does not warrant so many excursions into the bizarre. As for my friends, first, I have none. By that I mean that all our associates have always taken me for granted, sought your stimulus and fame, eaten my dinners and invited "The Fitzgeralds" places . . . Despised by my superiors, which are few, held in suspicion by my equals, even fewer, I have got all external feeding for my insignificant games from people so vastly different from myself that our relations were like living a play or I have cherished my inferiors with color: to wit, Stella etc. and the friends of my youth . . .

With dearest love, I am your irritated

Zelda

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Publicity photo of Zelda and Scott taken for Tender Is the Night, *1934.*

* * * Dear—you know that if I could sell any of my stories I would not have written this book. Ober is swamped with my things and it seems worthless to plague him with more. The fact that I have had Time to write it while you have had to put aside your own is due to circumstances over which I had no control and cannot bring myself to feel a sense of guilt. You, of all people, certainly would not have preferred my folding my hands during my long unoccupied hours. You must not forget that the Toxologic part of my illness is cured and I can no longer sit for endless blank periods in a trance as I did with eczema at Prangins. * * *

It is dreadful that I am not un-happy but I would not be away any sooner if I sat and cried. * * *

In the meantime, please try to be calmer. At present I realize that there is little that your life has to offer as a substitute, but I wish you could drink less—do not fly into a rage, I know you stay *sober*—but you need some rest and I can't think how you can get it except by using those miserable moments that gin helps to dispel and turn into activity by resting. * * *

I love you D.O.—I would have collapsed years ago if I'd had me on my hands. * * *

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* * * Also, I am so absorbed in the travel ads. . . . I look nostalgically on all the sun-burned people in the advertisements lolling on boats and beaches and think of the good times we only half appreciated. They are so young and *soigné* in the pictures. * * *

* * * I wish we could spend July by the sea browning ourselves and feeling water-weighted hair flow behind us from a dive. I wish our gravest troubles were the summer gnats. I wish we were hungry for hot-dogs and dopes[18] and it would be nice to smell the starch of summer linens and the faint odor of talc in blistering bath-houses.

* * * We could lie in long *citroneuse* beams of the five o'clock sun on the *plage* at Juan-les-Pins and hear the sound of the drum and piano being scooped out to sea by the waves. Dust and alfalfa in Alabama, pines and salt at Antibes, the lethal smell of city streets in summer, buttered pop-corn and axle grease at Coney Island . . .

It is rather disquieting to read of the importance of bangs and linen handkerchiefs, new brands of perfume, and new lines to bathing-suits in the papers. *I wish I had something* —D.O.!! * * *

* * * I played tennis to-day and seem to be better. We walked down under the tulip trees by the dark little bridge and watched the cows in their Corot frame. It made me homesick for "La Paix"—and even for those lonesome bicycle rides when I would come in to find "the Baron"[19] behind his rhododendron and his diamond-leaded windows . . . Will we be close again and will I feel the mossy-feeling back of your head and will I share those little regulations by which you keep your life in order: the measured drinks, the neatly piled papers; to see you choose which shirt to please the day and hear you fuss about the fancy handkerchiefs. * * *

* * * I watched the book section for the first opinion on *Tender Is the Night.* You forgot to send me a copy. Please

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do. Or shall I order it from Scribner? They certainly got it out beautifully . . . You looked so thin in New York. I suppose your milk is a hard thing to remember to order in restaurants. * * *

* * * I am so glad your book[20] is on the list of best sellers. Maybe now you will have some measure of that ease and security you have so long deserved. Anyway, I hope it sells and sells. * * *

* * * Don't worry about critics[21]—what sorrows have they to measure by or what lilting happiness with which to compare those ecstatic passages * * *

It's a swell heart-breaking book, because the prose compels you to respond to the active situations—which is as it should be.

I am very worried about finances. *Please* don't hesitate to do *anything* that would relieve the strain on you. * * *

* * * Darling, you were so sweet to telephone me. I am learning a speech to say when telephoned to. It is to be very formal and will include many invitations to parties which will never be given and balls that are long since over. And the response will be yes, yes, yes—* * *

The radio is a god-send. It is my constant guide and companion and I put it in bed at night to warm the sheets. Waffles can also be cooked on its sleek shining top. * * *

* * * It seemed very sad to see you going off in your new shoes alone. Little human vanities are somehow the most moving, poignant things in people you love—* * * Think of me. If my room is as empty to you as yours was when you were away you will find yourself living in another dream—as if there was a veil between you and reality—* * *

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* * * Scott: this place is most probably hideously expensive. I do not want you to struggle through another burden like the one in Switzerland for my sake. You write too well. Also, you know that I live much within myself and would feel less strongly now than under normal circumstances about whatever you wanted to do. You have not got the right, for Scottie's sake, and for the sake of letters to make a drudge of yourself for me. * * *

* * * I'm rather angry because people won't let me be insane and I wish you could accept me without that feeling of yours of wanting to acquit yourself well at a social function and go out and get drunk when it's over—

I love you, darling, and perhaps the boat will make us so sea-sick that we will be perfectly happy—

Devotedly
Zelda

* * * It seems very careless of the Murphys to have got old; like laundry in the corridors of a pleasure-resort hotel. They could get tragic, or join a curious sect, or escape to islands strung on strange parallels of latitude but to enclose the mechanics of the glamour of life in slowed-up motion rings of indecency.

* * * Every day I develop a new neurosis until I can think of nothing to do but place myself in the Confederate Museum at Richmond. Now it's money. We must have more money. To-morrow it will be something else again: that I ran when Mamma needed me to help her move, that my hips are fat and shaking with the vulgaries of middle-age, that you have to leave your novel, that there are unemployed, or millionaires, people better than I am and people worse, a horrible sickening fear that I shall never be able to free myself

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from the mediocrity of my conceptions. . . . The only message I ever thought I had was four pirouettes and a *<fouetté>*. It turned out to be about as cryptic as a Chinese laundry ticket, but the will to speak remains.

O Darling! My poor dear—watching everything in your life destroyed one by one except your name. Your entire life will soon be accounted for by the toils we have so assiduously woven. Your leisure is eaten up by habits of leisure, your money by habitual extravagance, your hope by cynicism and mine by frustration, your ambition by too much compromise. D.O. it is very sad and utterly meaningless and the only real emotion I have which will bear inspection is an overwhelming desire to expose charlatanism and ignominious harlotrys of what we so eruditely refer to as our civilizations. Freud is the only living human outside the Baptist church who continues to take man seriously.

Bunny's[22] mind is too speculative—nothing but futures—of the race, of an idea, of politics, of birth-control. Just constant planning and querulous projecting and no execution. And he drinks so much that he cares more than he would. * * *

* * * I went again to Bolero. Sacrilege! Ida Rubenstein! That music was not meant to be danced but played on drums-heads made from the stretched skin of Spanish intestines. * * *

* * * I feel almost constantly like those people in the flood pictures of the Bible and imagine myself with streaming hair and poignant cheek-bones. Then I look in the mirror and am very sad to find only my own countenance instead of some diabolic manifestation of so much introspection. * * * You and Scottie are probably perfect people. Does Julia give you biscuits and stuffed tomatoes on a Sunday? * * *

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Asheville

This last selection of Zelda's letters to Scott was written between the spring of 1936 and Scott's death in December, 1940. During this period Zelda was hospitalized at Highland Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, with frequent visits to her mother in Montgomery. Scott returned to Hollywood, again under contract to MGM, and began The Last Tycoon. *He died of a heart attack in Hollywood on December 21, 1940. He was forty-four years old.*

* * * Asheville has treated us to a burst of July dawns: red and hot and the birds singing as if the world were off to Pickett's Charge. * * * It is always reassuring to know that time still passes on. But I yearn for other civilizations; for brownness and beaches, and the friendly peace of supper-time in lazy shadow-garlanded southern towns. * * * I hope always that you'll show up in it soon. * * *

* * * If you are lying awake nights thinking up things to give me for my birthday, there's nothing intrigues me more than small square wrist watches that will support a banging.

The mountains still bloom but summer seems already here. I cultivate a minor coat of tan and lament the freshness of the morning air and long for the baked burnt scenes of my good times. * * *

* * * Wouldn't you like to smell the pine woods of Alabama again? Remember there were 3 pines on one side and 4 on the other the night you gave me my birthday party and

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you were a young lieutenant and I was a fragrant phantom, wasn't I? And it was a radiant night, a night of soft conspiracy, and the trees agreed that it was all going to be for the best. Remember the faded gray romance. * * *

* * * The screens that the hospital commissioned me to do are for *patients' bed-rooms*. To waste a professional talent, the cumulate result of years of effort, aspiration and heartbreak on a venture which will never see the light of day but most probably will be maltreatment by every manifestation of psychosis is, to me, an abuse of the soul, human faith, and métier that is almost beyond my capacity to envisage.

The money that the authorities promised to pay me is to be used on my bill. I feel that this is your obligation as I myself have bent every resource towards getting out of here . . . I don't want to pay these bills because I do not need what they buy.

I am not an alchemist, but in fairness, as you have always been—do you think that I am socially obligated to undertake an oil painting of 3 panels each for every room in this hospital? It is a spiritual outrage. * * *

On the other hand: I haven't any money. Dr. Carroll needs the screens: you refuse to let me leave: so he is very altruistic, and courteous to offer me the privilege of making a little money.

I am not blind to his generosity: but I will not, save under material compulsion, give my best professional talent to any such usage. Please send me the money to get out if need be. I know that you would be outraged in hatred and contempt of any such proposition. * * *

* * * I envy the Murphys their trip, and everybody else who is en route . . . Won't you let me spend a week browning in the Oak Park aquarium, riding a rented bicycle and living casually on bread and iced-tea and blackberry jam? . . . I would give anything nearly to renew the tangible evidence of having lived and cared—* * *

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Photo of the Sayre family home in Montgomery, taken by Lane Yorke while researching the play in 1979. The house is no longer standing.

* * * It rains and the air is chilled out of offering even the lugubrious and haunted quality of summer dreariness. Red clay oozes about the edges of my shoes and there is no promise in the sky. * * *

Being rain-bound, I have dyed all the hospital equipment and most of my belongings and I have put things into such order that they are at last rendered completely impenetrable, and very satisfactory as such. * * *

* * * Now there's snow and lightly laden branches a puffed protected world for Sunday. Snow domesticates horizons; the world is a fine white boudoir; the world is cared-for and expensive.

Dear Scott:

I'm sorry you can't sleep; and sorry that you don't like to get up. Maybe you ought to complain to the management. * * * Mamma is still in Hendersonville and it's always so

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Painting by Zelda Fitzgerald of the Sayre family home in Montgomery, Alabama.

pleasant to be with her. We choose the biggest zinnias and explore the merits of chocolate sodas. * * *

* * * For as long as a year, Highland Hospital is as excellent a regime as I know, but it's the only hospital that I have ever been in that makes *no* provision for any personal life * * * and after three years of such, the soul begins to perish. * * *

* * * Scottina has written at last. It was good to know that she still acknowledges my existence. Otherwise, it's Greenwich time in Greenwich and Maxim Gorky is as dead as ever. I wish we were astride the top of New York taxis and a little hilarious in parks and public places and younger than young people. * * *

* * * Happy birthday to you. I remembered you, and wished you happiness—* * *

I decided to refurbish my conversancy with the *monde actuel* by means of a gargantuan parcel of current publica-

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tions which I find very absorbing. Before I see you again I will know practically everything about the discovering of unobtainable cures for uncatalogued maladies; about the lives of all famous men known only to authors in need of pick-up money; and of the domestic habits of a few of our most select gangsters—and of how the emu rears his young.

Meanwhile, may you and your work prosper and many happy birthdays to you.—* * *

Dear Scott:

I lost your address: please send it again. What would I do if I should have a bad dream or an inspiration? It's much more conventional to know where your husband is when you've got one—besides, I might have something to tell you. * * *

* * * My pictures are crated at last; and I'll be happy someday to give another show . . . These are some of my best works; and dear to my heart; and your screen is among them. To ship them away gives me a good sense of being stripped and more adequate for action again. * * *

D.O., I would so like to get home in time to fix a small tree, to arrange Scottie's party, and to settle down to the holiday. *Won't* you make a request that I leave here by the 15th or 20th anyway? The difference can't mean anything much one way or another in my regime, and it can so startlingly transform my happiness—

So Please—
Devotedly and Gratefully
Zelda

Dear: A very impatient attractive boy, man or gray-beard, Princeton '18 Cottage who stutters wildly just called you up from Charlotte N.C. and wanted us to come up to a party. I couldn't understand his name on account of the voice flapping so in the breeze of the personality. He used to live in

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New Orleans and, I deduce, wears Davies suits and Sulka ties and saw you last in Switzerland. * * *

* * * I don't think our trip was as adequate as it might have been. I don't believe we attend the right spectacles. We ought to go to a good resort with entertainment provided and pleasure compulsory. * * *

Our vacations have been so uninspired.
Let's go to Greece
Or Lake Placid
Or Cuba * * *

Thanks for your telegram. It is so good to know you think of me. I think of you constantly and pray that I may find the means to communicate to you truths so strange according to our concepts, and so beautiful that they will move you to beautiful works to preserve them.

For God is the Actuality. God has evolved us from the beginning in Eden that we may ennoble our souls until they shall have attained a spiritual stature which can share His Beauty. That is the purpose of our lives, to increase our spiritual horizons. * * *

God came to me because I have been the longest created and so my receptive powers have permitted that it should be possible.

* * * I'd love to see home in the summer once more . . . The deep alfalfa fields and the low leaden moons and the frogs and the bull-rushes and that lethal content and depth of poetry that hangs over the south in summer—* * *

* * * Dr. Carroll has departed this world for Mexico; and won't revisit us until late next month. The plans seem to be of a more definite nature: that I leave here on the 15th—at which I am rejoiced. * * * I will try to find a job. Needless to say I am concerned with the difficulties which will probably confront me: middle aged, untrained, a graduate of half a dozen mental institutions. * * *

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Dearest and always
Dearest Scott:

I am sorry, too, that there should be nothing to greet you but an empty shell. The thought of the effort you have made over me, the suffering this *nothing* has cost would be unendurable to any save a completely vacuous mechanism. Had I any feelings they would all be bent in gratitude to you and in sorrow that of all my life there should not even be the smallest relic of the love and beauty that we started with to offer you at the end.

You have been so good to me and all I can say is that there was always that deeper current running through my heart: my life—you. * * *

Now that there isn't any more happiness and home is gone and there isn't even any past . . . it is a shame that we should have met in harshness and coldness where there was once so much tenderness . . .

I wish you had a little house with hollyhocks and a sycamore tree and the afternoon sun imbedding itself in a silver tea-pot. Scottie would be running about somewhere in white, in Renoir, and you will be writing books in dozens of volumes. * * * There are human bodies without identities as I am myself. But I hope life is very important in your hotel; that the lobby is full of people making estimates of each one's worldly goods. Places where life transpires under a cloud of suspicion are more exciting. Your interest, inexhaustible, tolerant and expansive has always made anywhere a desirable spot. * * *

North Carolina should be pines and pebbles, geraniums and red tile roofs—and very concise—it's a good place to get up early; there's a very polished sun to burnish the mountain laurel before breakfast . . . Biscuits and grits all floating in butter; resin on your hands and frogs bouncing out of the twilight. * * *

* * * Meantime life pursues a billowy and dreamy course; and people here seem happy despite the fact that every day a new country declares a new war—* * *

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* * * The air is lush and full of balm for bruised and bleeding souls. The nights are benevolent and of an emotional *volupté* that brings up all the old times that died on the breast of dreams: unformulated and unfulfilled. * * *

* * * Since the advent of the European cataclysm, personal orientations assume an irrelevance that leaves one without much comment on lives that are not in the line of the struggle. I wish I could go. * * *

* * * I wonder if you will ever be East again? You must be quite a different fellow than when I—* * *

* * * Dearest: I am always grateful for all the loyalties you gave me and I am always loyal to the concepts that held us to-gether so long: the belief that life is tragic, that a man's spiritual reward is the keeping of his faith; that we shouldn't hurt each other. And I love always your fine writing talent, your tolerance and generosity; and all your happy endowments. Nothing could have survived our life. * * *

* * * Your letters are glamorous chronicles of glamour. . . . It's fun: so many long roads reaching out to famous people, where they live and why—* * * I'm going to spend my birthday with Mamma, playing tennis I hope under the clay banks—scraggy pines amid the lonely hum of hot woods at mid-day. When I come back, I'll be older a year. * * *

* * * The wanderlust promenades the long lanes and seeps from under the honey-suckle hedges, and I wish I were sitting at lunch in a sandy sun-baked garden somewhere in Provence—* * *

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Epilogue

Zelda spent the years after Scott's death in the care of her mother in Montgomery with intermittent returns to Highland Hospital. She involved herself with her painting, bridge lessons and long solitary walks.

In one of the boxes at Princeton is the following, a portion of an unpublished short story entitled "The Big Top."

> *"He was gone . . . they had been much in love. He had been gone all summer and all winter for about a hundred years. Everything he did had been important. She wasn't going to have him anymore; not to promise her things nor to comfort her, nor just to be there as general compensation . . . She was too old to make any more plans—the rest would have to be the best compromise. She remembered the ragged edges of his cuffs, and the neatness of his worn possessions, and the pleasure he always had from his pile of sheer linen handkerchiefs. When she had been away or sick, or something, Jacob never forgot the flowers, or big expensive books full of compensatory ideas about life. He never forgot to make life seem useful and promising or forgot the grace of good friendship, or the use of making an effort."*

On March 10, 1948, late at night, a fire broke out in the diet kitchen at Highland. It quickly spread to the dumbwaiter shaft. The hospital was a wooden structure with no automatic fire alarm and no sprinkler system. The flames raged out of control to the top floor of the asylum. Six women—behind locked doors and barred windows—were burned to death. Zelda was one of them. She was identified by a small pair of charred slippers.

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Notes

1. Tootsie: Zelda's sister Rosalind, eleven years older than Zelda.
2. Tilde: Zelda's sister Clothilde, nine years older than Zelda.
3. Ring Lardner.
4. Janet Flanner [?].
5. "Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number—": an article written by Zelda but polished by Scott; credited to both of them.
6. At Easter, Zelda was hospitalized at Malmaison, the first of a series of clinics to which she was admitted.
7. Edouard Jozan: a French naval aviator.
8. The Val-Mont clinic at Glion, Switzerland.
9. Constance Talmadge [?].
10. The H.Q. of the 37th Div.—Scott's army camp.
11. Katherine Brush's novel *Red-Headed Woman*, a Jean Harlow vehicle, for which Scott was writing the screenplay.
12. Preliminary title of *Babylon Revisited.*
13. Trouble: the dog.
14. Maxwell Perkins.
15. The following is marginalia in pencil believed to be comments by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "This is an evasion . . . All this reasoning is specious or else there is no evidence of a tornado in the state of Alabama."
16. Underlining in pencil, probably by FSF as part of comments noted above.
17. Underlining in pencil, probably by FSF as part of comments noted above.
18. Dopes: cokes.
19. "the Baron": FSF
20. *Tender Is the Night.*
21. *Tender Is the Night* had just been published to very mixed reviews.
22. Edmund Wilson's nickname.

Photos of videotape and Sayre house are the property of Lane Yorke; all other photos are the property of Scottie Fitzgerald Smith.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Michael Brownstein is the author of *Strange Days Ahead* (Z Press) and *Highway to the Sky: "The Frank O'Hara Award Series"* (Full Court). He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

Thomas Glynn published the novel *Temporary Sanity* in 1977 with the Fiction Collective. His short stories have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Playboy*, and previously in the *Paris Review*. Currently he is at work on a novel, *The Book of 44 Butler Place*.

Victor Perera, writer and journalist, is co-author (with Robert D. Bruce) of *Last Lords of Palenque: The Lacandon Mayas of the Mexican Rain Forest*.

Murray Pomerance was born in 1946 in Hamilton, Ontario. "The Ninth Life," one of a group of partitas, is his first appearance in the *Paris Review*.

POETRY

Frank Bidart's third book of poems, *The Sacrifice*, will be published this fall by Random House. His poem "The War of Vaslav Nijinsky," was the first winner in 1980 of the *Paris Review*'s Bernard F. Conners Prize for a long poem.

Lavina Blossom has published work in *Dragonfly*, *Bellingham Review* and *Kansas Quarterly*. She graduated from the writing program at the University of California at Irvine in 1982.

Mark DeFoe lives in Buckhannon, West Virginia, where he teaches at West Virginia Wesleyan College and edits the *Laurel Review*. His chapbook, *Bringing Home Breakfast*, was recently published by Black Willow Press.

Madeline DeFrees directs the MFA program in Creative Writing at the University of Massachusetts. Her most recent book of poems is *Magpie at the Gallows*, published by the Copper Canyon Press in 1982.

James Fenton's book, *The Memory of War, Poems 1968–82*, was published in Britain by the Salamander Press in 1982. Random House will publish an expanded edition of the collection next year. Mr. Fenton, who works as a drama critic for the London *Sunday Times*, lives in Oxford. A collection of his drama criticism, *You Were Marvellous*, has recently been published by Jonathan Cape.

James Laughlin, the subject of one of this issue's interviews, is the publisher of New Directions.

Robert Moses is a schoolteacher in Cincinnati, Ohio. This is his first appearance in the *Paris Review*.

Lawrence Raab's most recent book, *The Collector of Cold Weather*, was published by Ecco Press. He has recently completed a new collection, *Years Later*. He is associate professor of English at Williams College.

John R. Reed's book, *A Gallery of Spiders*, was published by the Ontario

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Review Press in 1980. His poems have appeared in the *Sewanee Review*, *Bennington Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Ploughshares* and *Poetry*. He lives in Detroit.

May Sarton is the author of twelve volumes of poetry, seventeen novels and six books of nonfiction. Her most recent novel is *Anger*. A new journal, *At Seventy*, will be published by Norton next spring.

Elizabeth Spires has new poems appearing in the *New Yorker*, the *Yale Review* and *Antioch Review*, and is the author of *Globe* (Wesleyan Poetry Series). She lives in Baltimore, Maryland, and teaches at Goucher College.

INTERVIEWS

Karen Saum edits *This Time*, a newspaper which features interviews with crafters and homesteaders who are members of a craft and farm cooperative called H.O.M.E. (Homemakers Organized for More Employment), located in Orland, Maine. In 1979, she interviewed May Sarton for the videotape, *She Knew a Phoenix*.

Richard Ziegfeld first met James Laughlin in 1978 while doing research for a book-in-progress on author/publisher relationships—*Trust is the Measure*. Since then he has interviewed more than three dozen authors, editors, and publishers. His book on Stanislaw Lem will appear in the fall. (A few anecdotal paragraphs, reworded, have been extracted from Robert Dana's interview with James Laughlin which appeared in the November/December 1981 issue of the *American Poetry Review*.)

ART

Don Bachardy was born in Los Angeles in 1934, and currently lives in Santa Monica. Recent one-man exhibitions of his paintings and drawings have been held at Robert Miller Gallery, New York, and Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. *Don Bachardy: One Hundred Drawings* will be published by Twelvetrees Press, Los Angeles, in Fall 1983.

Patti Anne Blau was born in New York in 1955. Her work has been exhibited at P.S.1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York.

Robert Cumming was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1943, and lives in West Suffield, Connecticut. His photographs and drawings have been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Castelli Graphics, New York. His book, *Equilibrium and the Rotary Disc*, was published by Diana's Bimonthly Press in 1980.

FEATURE

Lane Yorke, an actress and free-lance photographer, lives in New York.

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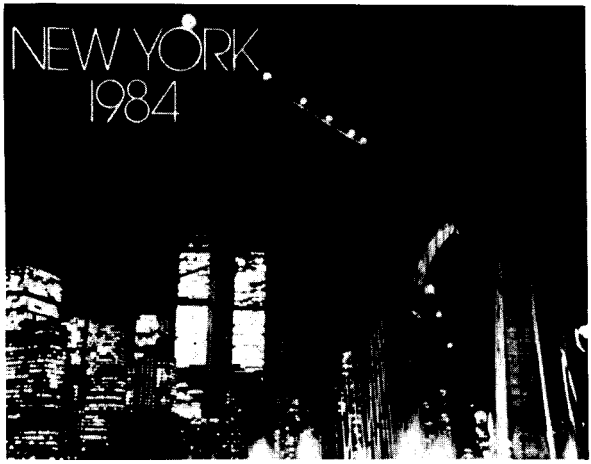

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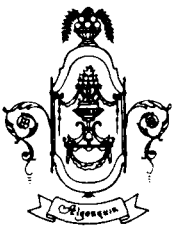

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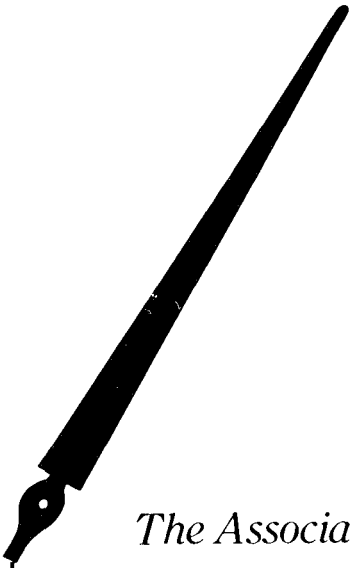

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